

“Seedless Straw” Is A Profitable Farm Crop

“Gardeners and vegetable growers want straw to mulch their crops, but they don’t want grain and weed seeds mixed in, so I’ve been producing ‘seedless straw’ for quite a few years,” says New Hampshire farmer Bob Frizzell. “I plant the crop as winter rye in the fall and cut it about June 1 the following year before the seed heads have developed. It dries in the field just like grain, and then I bale it.”



Bob Frizzell produces a large quantity of “seedless straw” on his New Hampshire farm that customers use to mulch gardens and for landscaping. Bales are stacked on pallets for easy handling and storage at his farm.

Frizzell puts up about 10,000 small square bales of straw a year from 100 acres of rye. “I can’t let it grow too tall because a rain and wind storm might lay it flat and then it’s ruined,” he says. “It would produce more bales later in June, but I’ve learned there’s no sense chancing it.”

He cuts the rye and lets it cure in the field for a week to 10 days, then windrows it before baling. Frizzell says, “I used to have a pull-type bar rake, but that left bunches which didn’t bale very well, so I bought a wheel rake and mounted it on the front of my tractor. Several years ago, I’d read about that setup in a FARM SHOW story, and it works great for me too.”

Frizzell has a specific process to harvest, stack, and store the bales. “We pull a dump wagon behind the baler that holds about 75 bales. When it’s full, we dump it, and then my crew stacks 15 bales on wooden pallets. When the bales are tied down, I load the pallets on a wagon with my forklift, haul them to my storage barns and stack them three or four high inside. The space between the pallets allows just enough air movement so the bales can cure a little more and not mold. The same process works great for hay.

Handling bales on pallets is a lot easier than moving them all by hand.”

Over the years, Frizzell has built up a long list of customers who travel nearly 80 miles to pick up his high-quality bales. First crop hay sells for \$7 a bale, second crop \$10 a bale, and straw starts at \$11 a bale with a discount for larger quantities.

Frizzell says raising the rye is just like growing a cover crop, although his seeding rate is almost 200 lbs. an acre, which produces more plants and more straw per acre. The heavy seeding rate produces more plants that smother weed growth, too. He built a 14-foot-wide roller to smooth his fields after seeding so cutting and baling on smooth fields is easier on equipment.

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He “Prints” And Sells Parts

“I’m a mechanic by trade who likes to tinker with ideas that fall under the label ‘work smarter, not harder,’” says Joe Raway. “With the recent advances in 3D printing, I’ve been able to bring some of my design and manufacturing ideas to fruition.”

Initially, Raway bought a 3D printer to make parts for his remote-control car hobby. “I watched a few Tinkercad instruction videos online and taught myself some simple CAD techniques. The products worked, so from there, I looked for simple problems, like my pop bottle falling out of my cup holder at work, and designed an inexpensive product that would prevent that.”

After a few different versions, Raway showed his magnetic cup holder insert to friends at work and they liked it. “I thought to myself that if my co-workers wanted them, there must be more people who’d be interested, so I began selling them online through Etsy. I’ve had a steady gain in sales over the past year and have been keeping up with production and delivery,” Raway says.

Another product he developed is a rocker switch removal tool that he’s been thinking about for 20 years. “Before I got into 3D printing, I could never make those little tools cheap enough or make multiples that were always the same,” he says. “With 3D printing, it was simple to duplicate the design after I figured out what worked best. I built on the success of the rocker switch removal tool by working with a local truck recycling dealer to make multiple designs for different vehicles.” He now has rocker switch removal tools for Peterbilt, Ford, Mack, and other trucks along with Bluebird school buses.

Raway uses PLA Plus to make his products, which is ideal because it doesn’t need venting during the printing process. “The downside is that the sun or heat can affect it and break it down or even warp it,” Raway says. “I have a warning on each product I sell that lets the buyer know this, and so far, I don’t have any complaints.”

The actual printing process requires anywhere from 2 hrs. on some of his products to more than 10 hrs. on others. Luckily, he



Raway makes a cup holder insert using 3D printer technology.



Raway makes and sells several different types of rocker switch removal tools.

doesn’t have to be nearby and watch the printer work. “Once the design is ready, I press ‘print’ and the machine does the rest. After that I just hope everything goes well,” he adds.

Looking ahead, Raway is hoping to work on products for the agricultural industry with ideas from a nearby farmer or ag equipment dealer. “I have one tool to remove a Deere switch and other tractors may need a different size, so I’d like to figure that out and make more tools,” he adds.

Cup holder spacers start at \$9.50 and rocker switches start at \$5 plus S&H at his Etsy store.

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Photos show before and after of coop turned guest house.

Chicken Coop Turned Into Guest House

Viki Pittman of Lawton, Okla., has given new life to her property’s 1920’s chicken house by transforming it into a comfortable guest space.

Pittman’s grandfather constructed the coop himself, including pouring the cement foundation.

In its prime, the chicken house likely contained 100 to 400 birds. But by 2016, it was derelict after decades of being used for nothing more than storage.

Pittman decided to give the chicken house a reset by transforming it into a guest house. She teamed up with her friend Ricky, a retired construction worker, and the two of them got to work using a plan he sketched on the back of a two-by-four. “I have no idea what I was thinking, taking on this project,” Pittman says. “We’d just finished an extensive renovation on our house, so I definitely didn’t need another big expense!”

Nonetheless, the pair chipped away at the chicken house over the following year, finding as many ways as possible to keep costs low. The house’s original metal



Main entrance after renovations.

roof was replaced, and the walls were fitted with leftover windows from her renovation. Pittman purchased most of the interior furnishings from local thrift stores and even sourced some key pieces from dumpsters. At first, Pittman left one side of the house as a functioning chicken coop, but the birds proved too messy and were relocated farther away from living spaces.

The final result is a cozy guest house that’s perfect when extended family comes to visit. It’s complete with many modern conveniences, including a bathroom, heat, and even air conditioning.

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“Insect Farm” Produces Exotic Pet Food

Timberline Fisheries was founded in 1973 by Ray Goodman as a seasonal live bait and tackle shop. Since then, the business has become one of the largest suppliers of live insects in the United States, shipping its insects to multiple zoos, every Petco, and half the PetSmart stores nationwide.

Despite this increase in scale, Timberline has maintained its roots as a Southern Illinois business. Today, Ray’s son Todd Goodman runs the insect empire.

Todd has many reasons for moving out of the bait business and into pet food. For one, the market for bait tends to be seasonal and localized. In other words, there isn’t much room for expansion. Decades ago, he attended an exotic pet food show that opened his eyes to a new business angle - pet food.

The pivot led to a dramatic increase in Timberline’s scale, shifting it from a business of about ten employees to over 160 employees today. The 250,000 sq. ft. facility in Marion, IL, raises crickets, wax worms, mealworms, and other feeder insects. Timberline ships out millions of insects per week, sending out three tractor-trailer loads of live insects daily and goes through more than 40 tons of specially formulated grain feed each week. An additional thirty tons



Timberline raises crickets, wax worms, mealworms, and other feeder insects, and ships out millions of insects per week.

of insect waste is collected each week, after which it is hauled off for use by local farmers as a natural fertilizer.

While the livestock might be small, Timberline treats their health and diet quality as a top concern. The company aims to mimic the mix of grasses and other plants each insect would forage for in the wild. This was partly accomplished through a partnership with Purina over two decades ago, which led to the development of a proprietary feed of ground grain wetted with nutrients and re-dried.

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