



"We get their contact information, and they go to the lot and get the equipment they want," says Naeve. "When finished, they call us with how long they used it and how many acres they used it on, and we bill them."

## They Rent Equipment On The Honor System

Customers of Iowa-based Custom Made Products Company can buy, rent or lease to own rollers and scrapers. The company, which bills itself as the largest U.S. seller of field rollers, has a unique distribution system. While owner Gary Naeve sells rollers and scrapers nationwide, the company also operates 14 honor-based rental and lease yards across Iowa, with one in Nebraska as well.

"We've shipped rollers as far as Florida," says Naeve. "If you go online and search for rollers, we're one of the first to pop up. We have 70 listed online and 60 to 70 available to rent."

Naeve got into the business of selling rollers after trying one on his own fields. He was so excited about the results that he started demonstrating to neighbors. Soon he was selling rollers near and far.

The rollers followed a pattern Naeve originally established with earth scrapers. He bought one for his own use initially. After wearing it out doing custom work, he sold it and bought another. Soon it was sold as well, and he was in the scraper sales business.

"We were the largest seller of scrapers in the U.S. until the farm retail organizations cut us out," says Naeve. "We still sell scrapers, but not like we once did. With rollers, no one can come close to us in price. We charge only 10 percent above costs."

Naeve started making mounts for

auxiliary tanks to go on other Deere tractors, which he patented. He soon added tanks and mounts for Oliver and IH tractors and 6600 and 7700 Deere combines.

Ever creative, Naeve developed one of the simplest systems yet for renting out equipment. Each equipment yard has a sign with an 800 number to call. In some cases, farmers call and ask if there is a location near them. A phone call is all that's needed; no contract, insurance, or paperwork is necessary.

"We get their contact information, and they go to the lot and get the equipment they want," says Naeve. "When finished, they call us with how long they used it and how many acres they used it on, and we bill them. I've only lost a few pieces of equipment over the years."

When people want to buy to own, they simply keep paying a monthly rental until it is paid for.

"If a rental customer decides they want to buy the equipment, we apply the rental payment against the price," says Naeve. "When we exhibit at a big farm show, people will come up to me and say, 'I've rented a roller from you for the past 3 years and never met any of you.'"

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Custom Made Products, Co., 1410 10th Ave. N, Humboldt, Iowa 50548 (ph 515-332-1875; cmpco@gncmp.com; www.gncmp.com).



Hene Supply has many different belts in stock for shipping, and can get specialty belts as well.

## Belts, Belts, Belts And More

Hene Supply has lots of belts, with more than 600 sizes in stock, from V-belts to link belts and flat belts for hay mergers. The link belts come in three widths (A, B and C) and are sold by length.

"We also splice belts for big round balers and can order specialty belts," says Harvey Hene, Hene Supply.

Hene Supply has been in business for close to 40 years and is a full-service farm store. They carry a wide variety of items including footwear, work clothing, lawn and garden supplies, bulk food, and more. However, Hene emphasizes the hardware and equipment portions of the business.

"We carry more than 600 bearings and plumbing parts," he says. "Our customers

keep asking for more, and we try to provide it."

Like most retailers, supply chain interruptions have been a challenge for Hene. "The supply chains are getting better, but it's still not back to what it was," he says.

Hene Supply mainly serves customers in Wisconsin and nearby states. "People from the area who have moved away will occasionally contact us," says Hene. "We've sent garden fertilizer to Montana and seed to Colorado and Michigan."

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Hene Supply, N14704 Frenchtown Ave., Withee, Wis. 54498 (ph 715-229-4530; www.justplainbusiness.com/hene-supply/).



Silo features a curved wall room with a kitchenette, dine-in area, and couch that pulls out into a full bed.

## Old Harvestore Converted To Airbnb

Liz and Jonathan Gerdes rehabbed an old Harvestore silo into a farm store with a second-level apartment. The store is only open Saturday mornings, but the apartment is available 24/7. Offered on Airbnb, it has proven more popular than the two young farmers ever hoped.

"We launched in early May, and the response has been amazing," says Liz Gerdes. "It's over and above what we expected, and we've had nothing but 5-star ratings."

The concept of a silo apartment didn't just happen. The Gerdes returned to Jonathan's family farm in 2011 to work with his parents and take over the dairy farm. When dairy prices tanked a few years later, they started looking for ways to add value and insulate themselves from dairy price fluctuations. Selling raw milk from the farm, which is legal in Minnesota, appealed to them.

Posting to Facebook Marketplace began attracting customers. As word-of-mouth built demand, the Gerdes realized they needed an on-farm store.

"Will suggested fixing up the silo," says Gerdes. "It had been damaged when the barn next to it burned in 2001. The roof had holes, and the sealant between the blue panels had melted away."

The family went to work on it, buying a used roof from a reseller of Harvestores in Wisconsin and resealing the panels.

"We turned the ground level into the farm store for customers to get their milk on Saturday mornings," says Gerdes. "We decided to turn the upper level into an area that could be used as an office and family and friends guest quarters."

They quickly found out why builders like square corners and flat walls. They also learned why builders like new wood. It took them 3 years in between full-time farming to finish the job. The round walls and extensive use of old boards from two barns being torn down in the neighborhood added to the challenge.

"I lost track of how many times we said we'd never build anything round again," says Gerdes.

YouTube was a major resource, teaching them things like applying water to sheetrock to bend it to fit the curves of the wall. Plywood was cut thin enough for shiplap on the walls. The ceiling was lined with some of the old barn wood, and old hay loft flooring became guest house flooring. Barn wood was also used for trim around windows.

"Working with old barn wood is an adventure," recalls Gerdes. "We love it for the character, but you pay for it with work to make it smooth and come together."

The result was a curved wall room with a kitchenette, dine-in area, and couch that



Converted Harvestore features an apartment at the top and farm store below.

pulls out into a full bed. A 3/4 bath includes a shower with exposed blue Harvestore panels. A ladder leads to an additional sleeping area in a loft above the bath.

"Once it was finished, we thought we'd see what happened if we put it on Airbnb," says Gerdes.

They priced it at \$115 per night, and it quickly took off. People love how unique it is, just the idea of staying in a silo is a grabber. Added to that is the working farm location with a 100-cow dairy.

In promotion and when guests arrive, Gerdes emphasizes that farm life is different from what they normally experience. She wants them to understand the family's way of life.

"I warn them that the farm day starts at 5 a.m., and if they don't like noise, close the windows and turn on the sound machine," she says. "I have a list of things to expect on the wall, such as the smell of manure when a 7,000-gal. tank of it drives by on the way to the field."

For the Gerdes, raw milk sales and an Airbnb rental have been a natural progression, one that isn't finished. They're already planning ways to further integrate agritourism into their farm life.

The success in raw milk sales and the rapidly growing interest in silo stays parallel to each other. In both cases, quality is key. Great care was taken in the silo rehabbing, and the same is true of the raw milk sales.

Airbnb customers suggest the same quality is paying off there with reviews like, "Beautiful farm, beautiful interior, and an incredible place overall."

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Gerdes Fresh Farm, 16839 Beaver Ridge Dr, Caledonia, Minn. 55921 (ph 612-619-3256; elisabeth.gerdes@gmail.com; www.gerdesfreshfarm.com; www.airbnb.com/rooms/859370401304938814?source\_impression\_id=p3\_1687352413\_ooYbqZtBu0zblgGV).