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Wisconsin Farm Known For Its Horseradish

Crops like horseradish are typically raised as sideline businesses. But at Huntsinger Farms in Wisconsin, crop planning for the farm's 5,000 acres centers around 800 to 900 acres of horseradish.

"We're the world's largest grower and processor. It's rare to do both," says Eric Rygg, president of Silver Spring Foods, the farm's brand and marketing division. Silver Spring is also the No. 1 refrigerated horseradish brand in the U.S.

The fourth-generation family operation started in 1929 with Rygg's great-grandfather, Ellis Huntsinger, who was of German heritage and included horseradish in the vegetables he grew to sell from the family farm. The Wisconsin farm is located near the 45th parallel and is ideal for growing horseradish, which is kept in cold storage to process when needed.

An accidental spill of cream in horseradish led the family to add cream to some of the

horseradish blends. The cream keeps the horseradish white and extends the shelf life by about a month.

The family has adjusted farming and marketing practices through the years to maintain a quality product that meets customer demand.

Plants start with offshoots from harvested horseradish. Rygg says the Big Top Western variety works well in Wisconsin.

"Longer roots are bigger and hotter. So, we leave the roots in the ground a little longer—18 to 24 mos.," he notes.

Horseradish is followed by corn, which can be harvested even with volunteer horseradish plants. Soybeans, oats, alfalfa and snap beans follow to build a nutrient bank for horseradish planted every 5 to 7 years in the rotation.

Equipment has been modified for planting and harvesting. Mechanization helps wash, grind and bottle the horseradish, which is very pungent and challenging to work with.

"We grind a lot of horseradish, so we have strong ventilation for our employees," Rygg says. "We also clean roots, grind and fill in separate rooms to reduce the pungency."

Silver Spring Foods prepared horseradish has just five ingredients—horseradish, distilled vinegar, water, salt, and natural flavor—so it's a pretty natural product

that adds interest to food, he adds. New products are continually added using horseradish in cocktail sauces, mustards and other sauces, such as Wasabi and Spicy Sriracha. They recently added a signature line of aioli and seafood marinades.

Rygg says Silver Spring products can be found in stores across the U.S. The website's store locator shows what products are available in your area. The farm also sells its horseradish in bulk to companies that make their own products.

Since his great-grandfather made his first horseradish, the operation has grown, processing between 7 and 9 million lbs. yearly.

"One difference with our horseradish is that we're a 95-year-old family business. We plan to leave it in better shape for the next generation, not just the next fiscal quarter. We invest in long-term sustainability with solar for energy, a water retention pond and a sound culture for our employees," Rygg says.

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Ground-Harvest Apples Used For Hard Cider

Slaughter Orchard & Cidery has been awarded a USDA Speciality Crop Block Grant for furthering the use of ground-harvested apples for hard cider. These annual grants are available for both for-profit and not-for-profit organizations and work to fund specialty crop research, education, and market development. With it, the Cidery will research better ground-apple production methods and teach other orchards, cider mills and cideries what they learn.

This \$163,000 grant will run for 2 years and includes research, an educational position paper, a model HACCP plan, and in-orchard demonstration days. Slaughter's orchard and apple processing research will take place at Hainlen Orchard in Converse, Ind., while the fermentation research will be centered at the Bloomington, Ind., Cidery.

Things are moving smoothly so far.

"The ground-harvest grant is making steady progress, and this fall will be our first ground apple harvest," says head orchardist and cidemaker Clay Slaughter. "We expect to start having preliminary results next spring and full results later next year. Next year, we'll also host our orchard demonstration days for anyone interested in learning more about the grant."

Slaughter believes this research offers a lot of potential for the fruit industry. "Ground-harvested apples have several benefits, including the ability to use fruit that would otherwise be wasted," he says. "Most orchards do not use apples once they fall to the ground, so it creates waste for the orchard. Using these ground apples creates another revenue source instead." Another benefit is an increase in specialty cider varieties. "Most cideries cannot source enough bittersweet and bittersweet apples to make hard cider due to low supply," he explains. "By utilizing all

the cider apples, both hand and ground fruit, we're able to have a larger supply of these specialty apples."

Slaughter shares that the biggest challenge remains ensuring that the harvesting, processing, and fermentation processes are done in ways that keep the ground apples and cider well separate from any hand apples and unpasteurized cider (juice). "The process of fermenting non-alcoholic sweet cider into hard cider makes it safe to drink," he says.

Looking forward, Slaughter Orchard & Cidery plans to continue passing on any breakthroughs they make in the research process. "We hope to continue educating orchards, cider mills, cideries, and the public about the benefits of utilizing apples that would otherwise become waste," says Slaughter. "We'll also look for other opportunities to support orchards and cideries through research."

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Colorado Artist Makes Jewelry From Horsehairs

By Carolyn White



Photo courtesy of Jennifer Hutson

Horsehair is very coarse and, once braided, incredibly strong.

Jennifer Hutson from Montrose, Colo., is a licensed massage therapist and certified equine acupressure therapist with a knack for crafty things like custom engraving on cattle, bear, deer, and elk skulls and doing

drawings with charcoal pencils. She never dreamed her artistic skills would one day launch a business.

Born and raised in farm country, Jennifer grew up riding her friend's horses. After moving to nearby Cedaredge, she finally got horses and a mule, along with cattle. In 2019, Jennifer lost her favorites on the same day. "Bubba, my Appaloosa, was 24. I got him when he was eight. He came down with Cushing's disease, which causes laminitis, lethargy and weight loss. Smokey, my mule, was almost 40 then and had raised both of my kids. His decline came from old age. I had to have both of them put down."

To help with healing, Jennifer saved their tails to create something from them. "I made a few jewelry pieces for myself, then slowly learned different braiding techniques in three, eight, 12, and 16 strands. Horsehair is very coarse and, once braided, incredibly strong. Friends saw my finished pieces and asked if I'd make something for them. Word of mouth started spreading."

Jennifer decided to name her new business Soul Fire Keepsakes.

The jewelry-making journey has had its challenges. Hairs must be washed, conditioned, and separated, strand by strand before the braiding process begins, which is tedious. Jennifer admits, "You learn as you go. I had to start over if the braids fell apart or didn't look straight on completion. It was total trial and error."

She bought a 6-in. dia. Kumihimo disk to make her work look more professional. "It's a square or round piece of foam with slots around it to hold the hair, with a hole in the center that the braid goes through. As horse hairs are pulled top to bottom and side to side, it keeps the braids nice, clean and straight and prevents things from slipping."

Ten to 50 hairs go into each section, depending on the order. Metallic threads in silver, gold, blue, teal, purple, or pink are combined into the braid for accent. For some bracelets, pendants and earrings, Jennifer orders sterling silver from Indonesia that's made specifically for horsehair keepsake jewelry, with special pockets to hold the hair.

As her product line increased, Jennifer created a website listing her phone number.

The first thing she hears when customers call in is, "I want something different."

"Typically, when I'm asked to make a keepsake for someone, they've recently lost their equine friend due to illness or injury. Once you know the background of the horse and rider, it helps create the piece. That's why everything I make is unique."

Jennifer asks questions before starting a project, including what the client wants, whether she should keep the jewelry simple or elaborate, and what price range to stay in. Women gravitate towards necklaces, earrings, and bracelets while men tend to choose keychains or something they can hang on their rearview mirrors.

Jennifer has "shipped all over the United States and even sent some gift pieces overseas."

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