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She Bakes Healthy Treats For Dogs

Connie Rau's 12-year-old bluetick coonhound Riley loves her job as the official taste tester for Joyful Paws Bakery. Peanut butter/pumpkin and peanut butter/banana treats are among Riley's favorites, as they are with many of Rau's canine consumers.

As human consumers have shifted toward purchasing locally wholesome foods for themselves, they also want real food with human-grade ingredients for their beloved pets. That's opened up business opportunities for home bakers like Rau.

After caring for her mother for years before she died in 2020, Rau wanted to find something to bring in income and get her out of the house occasionally. Besides her mother, she and Riley were also grieving the death of Sam, a 15-year-old black lab/border collie. Riley seemed to be constantly begging for treats, and as Rau sought healthful treats, she discovered a dog treat bakery. That led to an online course with Diva Dog Bakery that includes recipes and guidelines to help entrepreneurs meet regulations and develop sound business plans.

Rau uses her home kitchen for baking and one of the bedrooms in her rural Dewitt, Mich., home to store the ingredients, molds, equipment and two dehydrators for her business.

She contacted the Michigan Department of Agriculture for information to learn about regulations for her business.

"With dog treats, you need to send samples to an analysis lab. They give

you the crude protein, crude fiber, fat and moisture content for the label," Rau says, which also includes the ingredients.

She follows the recipes from the online course but puts her own spin on them. She uses farm-fresh eggs from her friends and purchases only organic cinnamon (Ceylon), which she uses in her own healthy diet. She bakes her treats in fun shapes, such as her blueberry muffin treats and peanut butter bones.

Since no preservatives are used, all the treats are dehydrated to give them a 2 or 3-mo. shelf life in sealed bags or longer when frozen. Since starting in 2023, Joyful Paws Bakery has had many regular customers at the three farmers markets Rau attends each week through October, along with holiday events. A couple of area stores also sell her treats.

So far, the farmers markets have worked out best. Licensing limits her to sales in Michigan only. She set up an online account, but shipping costs make it more challenging.

Rau also decorates cupcakes and cakes for canine birthday celebrations, so she stays busy year-round. She would also like to set up regular subscription deliveries.

Rau says Joyful Paws Bakery keeps her busy with baking, dehydrating and going to market. It's brought in additional income and ensured Riley always has plenty of healthy treats.

"She won't eat a store-brought treat," Rau says. "She sniffs at it and walks away."

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Joyful Paws Bakery, DeWitt, Mich. (ph 517-525-1935; joyfulpawsbakery@gmail.com; Facebook: Joyful Paws Bakery).

Concrete Floor Coating Made To Last

Before you cover your concrete floor with epoxy, consider using polyaspartic. It'll last longer, stand up better to wear and is UV resistant. Unlike epoxy, polyaspartic floors will handle hot tires. They won't soften and pull free like epoxy will as the tires cool.

"We've been doing Duralast polyaspartic coatings for 2 years, and the results have been excellent," says Bennie Miller, North Country Concrete Coatings. "Polyaspartic coatings are five times stronger than epoxy and come with a 15-year warranty against chipping or peeling."

Miller warns that studded tires will wear through the surface faster, but with normal traffic, the coating will last the full 15 years. The UV-stable coating will maintain a new look, stand up better to salt, oil and chemical spills and produce a 100 percent antibacterial surface.

"There is nothing wrong with epoxy in some spots, but in my opinion, it doesn't belong in high-traffic areas like garages," says Miller. "Customers tell me they've put epoxy down, and in a few years or even

months, they see it isn't holding up."

Polyaspartic coatings have been used on everything from bridges and piers to railcar exteriors and ocean-going barges and ships. They're non-yellowing and don't fade or peel with sun exposure. They also have a wide temperature tolerance of -30 degrees to 140 degrees.

Miller points out that epoxy simply bonds to the surface of a concrete floor. Polyaspartic coverings include a polyurea base coat that soaks into the concrete surface. Vinyl flakes are tossed on to give the preferred color before the rubbery base coat dries. Once it has dried, excess flakes are scraped off, and the final polyaspartic coating is rolled down.

"It grabs onto the rough surface of embedded flakes," says Miller.

The downside of polyaspartic coating is that it's a more expensive process. It isn't recommended for concrete floors that give off moisture as they can lose their bond. It also has to be applied quickly.

On the upside, a polyaspartic coating cures five times faster than epoxy. As a result, a job can often be completed in a single day. It has



"Worm castings are full of microbes and are like a probiotic for the soil to help plants grow. Without that biology, minerals don't get to the plants," Larson says. "It's the secret sauce to make things grow better."

Worm Farming Requires Attention To Detail

When Mike Larson left his family's bee farm 40 years ago to work in finance and computer software in Minneapolis, he never imagined becoming a worm farmer. But he grew bored and needed something to do when he retired to Brooten, Minn. The operator of a Racine, Wis., worm business inspired him.

Since Larson and his wife Karen started Brut Worm Farms 6 years ago, there's been a sharp learning curve in caring for worms.

"If your worms are happy and healthy, then everything works," Larson says. He went into the business fully aware of get-rich-quick schemes raising worms in buckets and bins that failed a couple of decades ago.

"African nightcrawlers need to be at the right temperature, at the right pH, and have the right feed amount. They eat a lot," Larson says, to produce good worm castings every couple of weeks.

The process starts with the right bedding. The worms do very well in the reed sedge peat that happens to be nearby. Initially, Larson harvested it himself, but he often got stuck in the bog. Now, he hires an excavator to dig enough peat in the winter to last a year.

The peat goes into large bins along with 10,000 worms. They're fed a proprietary mix of certified organic grain, including barley and alfalfa meal, which decomposes the peat's high organic matter for the worms. After a couple of weeks, the bins are turned upside down, and everything goes through a screening device to separate worms, cocoons, and castings. The cocoons go to a nursery to raise more worms, the worms go into a bin with fresh peat, and the castings are bagged for sale.

"Worm castings are full of microbes and are like a probiotic for the soil to help plants grow. Without that biology, minerals don't

get to the plants," Larson says. "It's the secret sauce to make things grow better."

When planting plants, customers mix it with soil in gardens and containers and use it as a top dressing. The microbes go dormant, so castings never go bad, he adds.

The worms are raised in buildings where Larson's father once worked to make parts for Brut snowmobiles, which were very popular in the early 1970s. Larson appreciates that he was able to repurpose the buildings and has friends and family who provide organic chicken and cow manure that he uses in other products he sells. One is Worm Dirt, a nutritional mix of organic components to revitalize tired soil.

The operation keeps the Larsons and a few full and part-time workers busy harvesting castings three or four days a week. The whole process can be seen on a short YouTube video: Brut Worm Farms Explained. Products can be purchased through their website, on Amazon, and at some big-box online stores. A 30-lb. bag of worm castings costs about \$34 (free shipping in the continental U.S.), and other sizes are available.

"Worm farming is an interesting kind of business," Larson says. "It's more work than we expected and took more money as an investment. But we like to think we're working with nature and provide a way for growing healthy food."

He's willing to offer advice to others considering worm farming.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Brut Worm Farms, 450 Industrial Park Rd., Brooten, Minn. 56316 (ph 320-634-6727; www.brutwormfarms.com).



Polyurea base coat with vinyl flakes.

low VOC and odor from outgassing.

Miller stresses that a key element of laying down a polyaspartic coating is properly preparing the concrete floor. "We grind the concrete surface and vacuum it to open up the pores of the concrete," he says. "This allows the polyurea base coat to soak into the pores," says Miller.

Miller received training in proper application technique from his distributor,

Steve Schmucker, Duralast Concrete Coatings. Schmucker has dealers throughout much of the Midwest, but as far east as New York and as far west as Montana.

Schmucker encourages FARM SHOW readers interested in becoming installers to give him a call. "We're always looking for dealers and emphasize the support we provide," he says. "We bring our dealers in for training and then again annually for updates and to

address any issues they've had. We want our installers educated and well-trained."

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