

**Ag  
World**



Rows of 6 by 3-ft. wire cage "dens" house Stevens' foxes.

**BEST PELTS BRING UP TO \$1,700**

**He's Mastered A "Foxy"  
New Farming Sideline**

By Dianne L. Beetler

An Illinois farmer says his new hobby "fur"-nishes him with good sideline income to supplement his farm operation.

Jon Stevens raises hogs, cattle and grain on his 160-acre farm near Altona, Ill. Two years ago, he added an exotic breed of livestock - eight pairs of silver foxes. This year, he bought additional breeding stock and he plans to expand to as many as 50 female foxes (called vixen) next year.

Stevens bought his foxes from breeders in Iowa and Wisconsin. A silver fox for breeding purposes costs at least \$200. Because he's keeping most of the pups to build up his breeding stock, he sold only three pelts last year but the best one brought \$160. Prices for pelts generally range from \$100 to \$300, but Stevens notes that a new crossbreed called a "sapphire" has a pelt that brings as much as \$1,700.

Stevens keeps his foxes in wire cages that measure 6 ft. by 3 ft. and sit approximately 1 1/2 ft. off the ground on cement blocks. The rear of each cage has a 2-ft. by 3-ft. wooden "den". Dens can also be fashioned from dark plastic barrels. They're divided into two sections, one for whelping (giving birth) and the other for the newborn pups.

To reduce noise from the animals, Stevens enclosed the cage area with a sheet metal fence. The enclosure is located in a pasture south of the house. He keeps males and females together except during whelping. The same pairs are mated each year and may be bred 5 or 6 years. Vixen come into heat for only 3 days each year. Their cycle depends on the amount of light and length of the days. The gestation period is between 56 and 60 days long. During the hours after birth, care must be taken to avoid disturbing the mother because too much light or noise may cause her to eat the pups. Average litter size is five pups, although two of his vixen have yielded 9 pups. Artificial insemination techniques have not yet been perfected for foxes.

After pups are weaned at 6 wks. of age, Stevens moves them into slightly smaller "pelter" cages. He cleans manure from beneath the cages just 2 or 3 times a year. Pups can be easily handled at a young age but become increasingly aggressive as they grow. He always wears heavy leather



Stevens always wears heavy leather gloves when handling foxes.

gloves when handling the animals. He waters the foxes once daily and feeds them a pellet feed with either a milk or meat by-products base. He occasionally feeds the animals raw meat but avoids pork because foxes are very susceptible to pseudorabies. Six to 7 oz. of feed per day is enough to maintain a growing animal. Stevens vaccinates for canine distemper and worms them twice a year.

Foxes shed in the spring and their pelts reach prime condition in December. Stevens electrocutes the animals and then skins them. He says a skilled skinner can do six an hour. He ships the frozen pelts by UPS to a Wisconsin firm that cleans and dries pelts for a cost of \$4.50 apiece. He then sells the pelts through a Canadian auction company, which grades the pelts on the basis of size, color and thickness. Many are sold overseas.

Stevens started with silver foxes but has since bought several gold foxes because of the higher value of their pelts. "I started raising foxes because I thought it was neat and I wanted to try it. As it turned out, I was surprised by how good the profit picture looks."

For more information, contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Jon Stevens, Rt. 1, Altona, Ill. 61414 (ph 309 484-4502).

*Editor's Note: Most of what goes into Ag World stems from story ideas sent to us by readers. This special section of FARM SHOW touches on the lighter side of farming and ranching — everything from human interest stories, to unusual hobbies, to unique things farm families are doing for fun or profit.*

*If you've read or heard a good Ag World type story you'd like to share with others, send it to: FARM SHOW, Box 1029, Lakeville, Minn. 55044.*

**IOWAN SET WORLD RECORD BACK IN 1946**

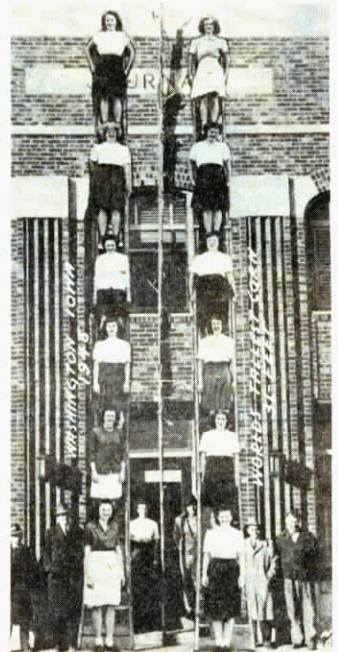
**Tall Corn Story Topped  
By Tales Of Iowa Stalk**

Our story last issue about the 22 1/4-ft. tall "world record" Wisconsin cornstalk (Vol. 11, No. 5) resulted in several letters from readers, all informing us about the same man, Iowa corn grower Don Radda, who grew one giant cornstalk after another during the late 1930's, 1940's and on into the 1950's.

Radda, who farmed near Washington, Iowa, first entered his stalks in the tall corn contest at the Iowa State Fair in 1938 and quickly became the undisputed world champion for many years. His daughter, Julia Radda Zieser, still lives on the home farm with her husband Wayne and two sons.

"To set the record straight, the world record for raising tall corn remains here in Iowa with my father who's now deceased. In 1946, he produced a stalk 31 ft. tall," says Julia, who sent along a packet of news clippings, written at the time, about her father's corn growing talents. She also sent along a postcard that shows 12 pretty girls stacked up 6-high on either side of the tall stalk to emphasize its height. FARM SHOW has since learned from other readers that many Iowans still have copies of that famous postcard tucked away in closets or old family scrapbooks.

For many years Radda was a well-known celebrity in Iowa and around the country due to his corn growing talents. "Our farmhouse is full of newspaper articles, plaques, trophies, ribbons, and photos which resulted from the many different tall corn contests, including one sponsored by WHO radio in Des Moines. He even challenged and won against the states of Ohio, Indiana and Kansas, getting statewide politicians involved. His tallest stalk was featured in Ripley's Believe It Or Not. What was



This 1946 postcard shows Radda's 31-ft. cornstalk with 12 girls stacked up alongside.

remarkable was that in addition to growing tall corn, he was also Iowa's Master corn grower for years. In 1948 he established a record yield for Iowa corn producing 221.23 bu. per acre," Julia told FARM SHOW.

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