

PROFIT OPPORTUNITIES ABOUND

Their Businesses Are Growing Like Weeds

It takes a lot of skill to sell weeds to farmers, but two North American entrepreneurs have developed the knack.

Terry Foley, Harrison, Idaho, and Allen Lockard, Eolia, Mo., say their weed businesses are booming, with the potential to make millions of dollars a year. The men grow and broker sales of weeds, herbs,

roots, barks and other natural products to herbalists, natural food stores and pharmaceutical companies.

If you're in the right part of the country and are looking for a new money-making opportunity, you might be able to grow weeds for them, too. Here's more information about the two weed companies.

Northwest Venture Farms

Farmers and the government have been trying to eradicate "goat weed" for more than 50 years, says Terry Foley of Northwest Venture Farms (NVF), but goat weed, or hypericum, can fetch as much as \$5 a lb., and each acre produces at least 1,300 lbs. It's much sought after because hypericum is used to produce St. John's Wort - the "hottest" new product in health food stores. It's used to treat depression.

St. John's Wort is already used widely in Europe as a natural alternative to the anti-depressant drug Prozac and has been proven safe and effective by university studies in the U.S., Foley says.

He has contracted with 35 farmers in Washington state and northern Idaho to grow 2,400 acres of the weed this year, and the company expects to produce 2.64 million lbs. of it. Commercial-grade seed stock comes from NVF's greenhouse. It produces a bushy, 12-in. high, 12-in. dia. plant with five-petal yellow flowers. The whole plant is "micropulverized" at a processing plant.

The perennial weed is planted at 15 grams per acre with NVF equipment on irrigated land in May. It's harvested with green-chop forage-type equipment by NVF custom harvesters in late August or early September the first year and some is harvested as early as early July in subsequent years. The first year it produces about 990 kg's (weight out of the



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field) per acre and up to 1,800 kg's in subsequent years. Life span after two years isn't yet known, Foley says.

Cost of production and delivering the weed to NVF is \$450 to \$550/acre, excluding a one-time \$380 per acre program enrollment fee and harvest costs of about \$75 per acre, he says. There's one drawback, though. Hypericum thrives only in certain areas. So far, the only growers are within a 300-mile radius of Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, because that area has the ideal growing weather for the weed.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Foley's Northwest Venture Farms Inc., 5805 South Lakeside Drive, Harrison, Idaho 83833.

American Botanicals

Allen Lockard's Eolia, Mo., company did \$14 million worth of business worldwide last year.

Lockard, 44, has been collecting medicinal herbs, roots, barks and weeds for 30 years. American Botanicals' catalog includes over 100 items collected from a network of some 100,000 collectors and growers all over the U.S.

Here are just a few items American Botanical is interested in: echinacea, better known as purple coneflower, an herb processed and used for treating colds; U.S.-produced ginseng root which is sold in Asia for a variety of uses; slippery elm bark which is used in making throat lozenges. And golden

seal used for treating upper respiratory illnesses such as colds and flu.

"Prices fluctuate throughout the year," Lockard notes. "For example, a pound of dry echinacea may bring anywhere from \$10 to \$20, according to supply and demand."

The company provides complete instructions on harvesting the products it buys. For example, "when collecting herbs, do not pull them out of the ground, cut them off and leave the root system in the ground for regrowth," advises its catalog.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, American Botanicals, P.O. Box 158, Co. Rd. FF, Eolia, Mo. 63344 (ph 573 485-2300; fax 3801; E-mail American Botanicals).

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Woven Rope Ladder

"They're much easier to carry to the top of a grain bin than conventional aluminum ladders, and much stronger too," says John Van Noord about the lightweight, indestructible rope ladders he weaves out nylon rope.

Until recently the Detroit, Texas, farmer made the ladders mostly for recreational purposes, such as for climbing into and out of tree houses and hunting blinds. But one day, he dropped some tools down an open grain bin hatch and tried unsuccessfully to retrieve them with an aluminum ladder. When he tried his rope ladder, a light bulb went off.

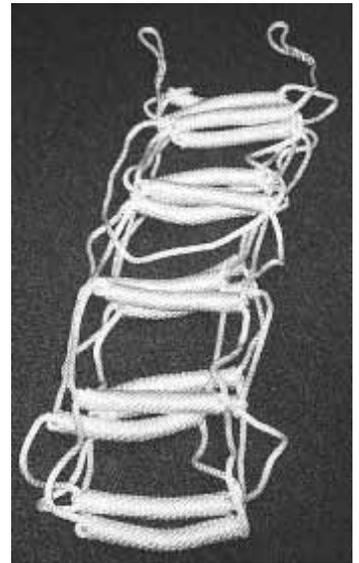
Unlike other rope ladders on the market, which are constructed with wood or steel rungs, Van Noord's are made solely from rope.

"The entire ladder is made from a single length of 3/8-in. dia. nylon rope," he explains. "Each step is formed by wrapping one end around and around the other end using the same knotting principle that's used to make a 'hang man's noose.' The design can produce a ladder of any length."

As for weight, a standard 20-ft. ladder weighs about 5 lbs. but will support over 400 lbs., he says, adding that it still fits in a shoebox.

Another use for the ladder is as an emergency escape ladder. You can keep one under the bed. Using the same process, he's also found it's possible to connect two or more of the ladders side-by-side to form a strong, checkerboard-type climbing net, he says.

To help make his ladders more quickly, Van



Entire ladder is made from a single length of 3/8-in. dia. nylon rope. Its light weight makes it easy to carry around.

Noord built a sort of jig assembly, a template mounted on a roller assembly. "It holds the rope in place while I'm wrapping each step," he says.

Ladders sell for \$3.25 per ft.; nets for \$4.50.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, John Van Noord, "Rope Works", Rt. 2, Box 212, Detroit, Texas 75436 (ph 903 674-2223).

"Swing-Down" Ladder Fits Into Stake Pockets

Climbing onto flatbeds and dump trucks is easy with this new "swing down" ladder that fits into a stake pocket.

You can slip it into an existing pocket or attach a stake pocket bracket that the company supplies.

The ladder is 39 1/2-in. long and has a 36-in. high grab handle. A 2-way gas-assisted shock makes the steps easy to put up or take down. The step section latches in the upright position to the grab handle when not in use.

The steps have a tread grip that provides sure traction. Unit can be easily moved from vehicle to vehicle.

Fits pockets from 1 1/4 to 1 3/4 in. deep.

Both models sell for \$220 plus S&H.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Knapheide Truck Equipment Co., 1920 E. Front St., Kansas City, Mo. 64120 (ph 816 472-4444).



Ladder comes with 36-in. high grab handle. Steps flip up and latch to handle when not in use.

Concrete Bucket For Skid Steer Loaders

A new concrete-hauling bucket for skid steer loaders eliminates the need to shovel or use a wheelbarrow.

The "Mud Bucket" lets one person accurately place concrete into forms with no mess. It weighs 290 lbs. and will haul up to a half yard of concrete. The bucket is available with either a hydraulic or manual control lift gate on front, allowing the operator to unload concrete without getting off the machine.

The hydraulic lift gate model sells for \$1,195; manual lift for \$895.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, McMillen Construction Equipment Attachments, 4419 Ardmore Ave., Fort Wayne, Ind. 46809 (ph 800 234-0964; fax 219 747-9161).



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