

New Ways To Make Money On The Farm

Natural Fill Pillows

Marcy Whitcombe's custom curtain and drapery business took off so well that all that sewing was giving her a pain in the neck - literally. To ease her pain, she sewed up a "therapy pillow" and filled it with buckwheat hulls, figuring the hulls would allow the pillow to shape to the contours of her neck.

It worked, her neck muscles relaxed, and she had a new product to sell. Besides buckwheat hulls, she also uses hulls from spelt and millet and even whole flaxseed to fill pillows. She's even added lavender to some pillows, on the belief that the scent will help the sleeper relax.

Buckwheat hull pillows are also said to reduce snoring and some people even claim they reduce problems from sleep apnea.

Natural fibers and fillers for pillows are available from a number of sources. Check first with your local elevator or natural food store. You can order buckwheat hulls by phone or online from James Farrell & Co., Seattle, Washington (ph 206 623-1993). An 18-lb. bag sells for about \$40 plus S&H.

You can find more information on natu-



Pillows filled with buckwheat hulls can cure aches and pains, say proponents.

ral pillow stuffing materials online at these internet websites:

<http://www.seaswell.com/educate.htm>;

<http://www.makura.com/lang/>;

<http://www.motherearthpillows.com/>;

[http://www.sustainabilitystore.com/](http://www.sustainabilitystore.com/providers/bean_products.htm)

providers/bean_products.htm

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Start Your Own Lobster Farm

Lobster is great to eat, but it's expensive and almost impossible to get during the winter months. Now, you can raise and breed your own lobsters with minimal effort, right in your own basement. "I knew nothing about aquariums when I started a year and a half ago," says Sherry Jansen of Blue Marina Ponds. "But they're easy to take care of and produce beautiful, electric blue freshwater lobster."

Blue Marina Ponds sells a start-up kit to begin your own freshwater lobster farm. The lobsters, originally native to New Zealand, have become popular in restaurants around the country. Starting with just a dozen lobster you can produce thousands over the course of a couple years. All you need is clean water and a somewhat large container such as a kiddie-pool. Time commitment is small. "I spend about an hour a day and I have many more lobsters than the typical person would," says Jansen. The lobsters will grow to full size in a couple months.

The requirements for lobster farming aren't that numerous. Freshwater lobster will tolerate a large variety of water conditions but they do need the temperature to be above 60 degrees. You will also need to do a few chemical adjustments here and there. Using a pow-

ered filter goes a long way to maintaining the tank and can be bought for \$50. Adding grass or willows to the water along with floating screens will give the lobsters shelter and provide them with plenty of food. "I feed mine rabbit food, but they'll eat almost anything," notes Jansen.

Lobsters are sold based on their size and breeding abilities. Prices for a startup lobster kit of baby lobsters start at \$75. Ready to breed lobsters are \$20 to \$25 a piece. The minimum for any order is 12 lobsters. Breeders are responsible for their own equipment and should check with their state's DNR regarding the regulations for raising imported species. Blue Marina will provide basic support information as well as ongoing advice.

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Mobile Poultry Processing Plant

When extension specialist Terry Swagerty at Washington State University was approached by a group of small poultry producers who were looking for an efficient way to slaughter birds for their own use and possible sale to the public, he helped them put together a mobile poultry processing plant.

Starting with an enclosed 8 by 20-ft. trailer, Swagerty and the poultry producers designed a self-contained slaughter plant that contains all the essential equipment: killing cones, a scalding, picker, evisceration station, scales, and packaging equipment.

The trailer is laid out with a dirty room at the back where the birds are killed, scalded and plucked, and a clean room at the front for weighing and packaging. Birds are passed from the dirty room through an access window with strip curtains to the clean room in sanitized food grade totes.

"All work stations are stainless steel, and there's a commercial scale that prints labels," Swagerty says.

A propane-fired Bosch tankless water heater is used for cleaning and sanitizing before and after use. It takes about a 20-lb. tank of propane to process 180 birds.

Much of the equipment on board the trailer requires electricity, which is supplied by the user. "It's wired for 110 single phase power with a 50-amp breaker box, but all we need is a standard 30-amp RV-type plug," he says.

Swagerty started the design process by getting an application from the Washington State Department of Agriculture for a wholesale food processing license and then adapted the trailer to meet all the requirements. "The biggest issue was cleanable surfaces, so that was no big deal," he notes.

Swagerty says one of the advantages they hope to see by using the trailer is lower costs for processing poultry. "The whole idea is to have the farm family develop the skills to operate it and provide the labor. If we have to hire a crew of three or four people, then I think the cost would be prohibitive on a small scale," he notes. He does intend, however, to set the trailer up in a central location and do custom processing for very small



A single enclosed trailer contains everything needed to dress and package a bird in about 30 minutes.



Stainless steel is used as much as possible in the trailer to make for easy cleaning and a sanitary environment.

quantities, such as a couple dozen broilers for home use. "We'd hire a crew for this and charge maybe \$2 a bird or more, but the customer would be able to drop their birds at the back door and pick them up packaged and ready to cook or freeze at the front door about 30 or 40 minutes later.

The trailer is owned by the Community Agricultural Development Center, a not-for-profit corporation. He says there's been interest throughout Eastern Washington so he'll probably take it on the road doing demonstrations.

"This was possible only because the USDA exempts processors of 20,000 birds or less from the requirement of an on-site meat inspector," he says.

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People crowd around the 5-ft. dia. skillet to watch food cook.

Giant Skillet Draws Crowds

Don Philips is a farmer who has used his ingenuity to literally build a sideline business from scratch. The Washington, Pennsylvania man and his wife, Edwynna, started a food vendor service last year that centers around a unique home-built 5 ft. propane-heated skillet he made. They call their operation, "Ma's Country Fixin's."

"We've been doing food vending at weekend events and are trying to build it up to a fulltime deal for our retirement," Philips says. "We've been doing really well with it, travelling around Pennsylvania and West Virginia. Last year, we worked out of a tent, but we recently built a trailer that houses the skillet, two freezers, a refrigerator, counters and a sink."

Philips is constantly told that the skillet is like nothing anyone has ever seen before in their life. It is a big crowd-pleaser, and it practically sells the food itself, as people can walk right up to see and smell the food cooking. They like the fact they can watch their food while it cooks, he says.

"The visual part of it is what sells. It's a totally unique way of food vending," he says. "We sell home-fried potatoes, sirloin steak

subs, hamburgers, hotdogs and smoked sausages. Whether people are hungry, or whether they're not, they stop and ask about the skillet."

The big pan's base is made with square tubing and angle iron. Philips then installed six individual large turkey cooker burners. (They put out enough heat to heat your garage, he jokes.) The stainless steel skillet is 5 ft. in diameter and has four handles welded on. Weighing 160 lbs., the unit is reinforced with ribs underneath.

Philips has a bracket in the trailer to keep it stationary during transport, but rolls it into position when he's open for business.

The skillet is fueled by a 200-lb. propane tank located on the backside of the trailer, with hoses running underneath.

"The uniqueness of our equipment makes us more of an attraction than just an ordinary vendor, and that has helped a lot when trying to get into various shows and events," says Philips.

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