

Money-Making Ideas To Boost Farm Income

Knife-Making Business Going Strong

Ed Storch can turn old roller chain, steel cable, and any other kind of high carbon steel into a knife, dagger or sword. The Alberta farmer started making knives for fun but he not only makes knives, he also teaches knife making and sells the equipment needed to make knives. Last year business grew to the point that he rented out his farm and devoted himself full time to knives (see Vol. 25, No. 1).

"The business just keeps growing," he says. "I have more students and am traveling more all the time."

Storch has been traveling so much he even put together a special metal table equipped with tools to use at his workshops. The 5-ft. by 14-ft. table is loaded with 8 flat grinders, two 2 by 72-in. belt sanders, a couple of buffers, a small drill press and a small band saw. Stored underneath the table are heat treating forges as well as tooling and hand tools.

"I get so many requests for classes away from home that I needed a way to take my tools with me without having to load each one into my truck," explains Storch. "I just jack it up with camper jacks, back my truck underneath, and drive away."

Storch sells many of the tools he builds, including the belt sanders and flat grinders for between \$1,000 and \$1,400 (Canadian).

"I use 3-phase motors on a single phase line," explains Storch. "The new digital inverters let me change cycles by dialing down. They are so much more efficient; we use them on lots of machines for the farm."

Other tools for sale include an air hammer that strikes up to three times per second with four different sets of dies for \$3,500. He also makes and sells a 42-ton hydraulic press with dies for the same price.

"Commercial machines are available and can be adapted, but they will cost several times more," he explains. "If people prefer



Ed Storch teaches knife-making and also sells equipment needed to make knives. The business has grown so much he rented his farm out and works on it full time.

to build their own, I have a video for \$55 that explains how to make them and where to get the parts."

Commercial machines also may not work as well for the specialized knife making business. "With knives, you need to be fast to work the steel before it cools," he explains.

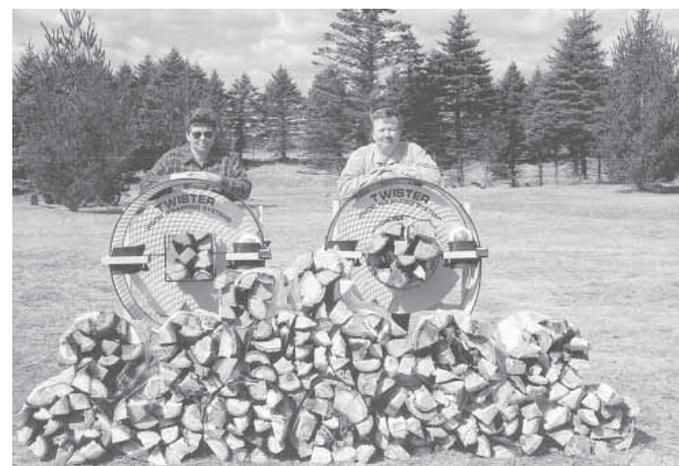
His rates for classes vary from \$30 for a class in his shop to \$180 for an annual symposium for knife makers. And one advanced class, for making Damascus knives, costs \$450.

"Damascus knives sell for about \$100 per inch," explains Storch. "For \$450 my stu-

dents learn to make the steel, make a letter opener, a 4 to 6-in. knife and take home enough steel to make two more knives."

Knife making is not just a guy thing. Storch reports about 10 percent of his students are women. His mother Florence is one of them. She just celebrated her 91st birthday by finishing her eighth knife.

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"Twister" wraps bundles of firewood in stretch plastic. A bundle of firewood can be wrapped in 12 to 15 seconds in either a square or rounded shape.

"Twister" Boosts Firewood Business

If you're in the firewood business, or have thought about getting into it, you might want to check out the Twister. It's a machine that wraps bundles of firewood in stretch plastic and is the best idea Chuck Sheely ever had.

"My dad had a campground with 300 sites, and I was bundling about 40 cords of wood a year to sell to campers," recalls Sheely. "I built the first one for myself and then built more for friends."

It worked so well, Sheely started manufacturing the Twister. He has satisfied customers throughout the U.S. and as far away as Chile. Many of his customers are part time loggers who split and bundle firewood on the side.

A bundle of firewood can be wrapped in 12 to 15 seconds in either a square or rounded shape. The patented tension spring clutch adjusts how much the plastic wrap stretches, producing bundles that are self-tightening. Because the ends are left open, firewood can be bundled wet and left to dry in storage.

The machines are designed to wrap firewood from 12 to 24 in. long, but they have been used to wrap everything from kindling to surveyor's stakes.

"I have one customer who uses his to wrap rejects at his arrow factory and sells them for kindling," says Sheely.

To use a Twister, wood is stacked in the square or round form, and the plastic wrap is held in place with one hand while the revolving wheel behind the form winds around the bundle with many layers of stretched plastic. Labels can simply be inserted at any point and wrapped in place.

For big jobs, Quick-Load baskets can be used. Sized to fit the holders on the Twister, helpers can fill the baskets while the operator is wrapping. When a bundle is finished, a basket is simply dropped through the form leaving the wood behind, ready to be wrapped.

Twisters come in a number of models and sizes. Prices range from \$1,695 to \$2,300, depending on the size of motor and bundle size and shape.

Sheely also makes conveyer elevators designed to feed firewood from an automated processor to a table where baskets can be loaded for bundling. Although every elevator tends to be a special order, a 25-ft. elevator with a hydraulic motor running off a 5 hp gas engine will run about \$5,500.

"A 25-ft. elevator will handle more than two cords per hour and keeps ahead of any processor on the market," says Sheely.

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New Ways To Get Stuff Free!

If something sounds too good to be true, it usually is. But when it comes to the Minnesota Materials Exchange (MME) and dozens of other similar organizations around the country, what you hear is true: you can get tons of free stuff just for the asking.

Just ask Kevin Smith. Thanks to the MME, his pigs once got their fill of passion fruit, kiwi fruit and strawberry fruit filling when Smith got a couple semi loads of the stuff. Another time, the Zumbrota, Minn., farmer picked up a load of potato flakes and corn starch.

Funded by state and local governments, organizations like MME help find homes for unwanted materials. A recent listing on the MME website included buckets, bags, boxes and even a barn. While some items have a fee attached, others are free, as is the service. If you know what you want, you can even place a wanted note on the site.

"There are many programs like ours around the country, but no national organization," says Barb Nesheim, one of several MME coordinators. "We used to print lists of what we have, but there isn't enough funding, so we ask people to call or use our website."

In one recent month, more than 40 items were listed as available including a free adding machine with tape. Another 50 listings from people looking for items included children's chairs, art supplies and even a motorized wheelchair. While asking for a specific item might seem like a long shot, Nesheim says it does work.

"I had a woman who requested a chicken plucker," she recalls. "I didn't know what one even looked like. Two weeks later she emailed me that she had received one."

More common items are office furniture and materials used for shipping, such as packing peanuts and cardboard boxes. One man who uses the list takes any wood item, especially pallets, and grinds them up for mulch.

Hog farmer Smith has been feeding byproducts for about 10 years using a Big Dutchman liquid feed system. He mixes in whatever he gets through MME with ice



You can get tons of free stuff just for the asking, by going to the Minnesota Materials Exchange and dozens of other similar organizations around the country.

cream waste and other items he gets from local food processors. The byproducts help lower his feed cost for the 3,000 head of pigs he markets each year.

"Usually I don't find anything suitable on the list, but when I do, I haven't had to pay for it," says Smith.

Even when you don't find just what you are looking for, what you do find on the list can get the mind racing.

There must be something 6 to 8-ft. rigid cardboard tubes could be used for, or how about a pile of cardboard drums?

"The exchanges like ours are great for people with a creative eye and the ability to tinker," says Nesheim. "Our basic goal is to keep good things in use and out of landfills. It saves both parties money and saves space in the landfill."

To see a list of exchanges, visit www.wastexchange.org for a list of nearly 100 websites and exchanges in the U.S., Canada and a number of other countries.

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