

# Farm-Based Businesses Help Boost Incomes

## Mushrooms Bring Success To Rural Couple

When Wendy and Tom Wiandt decided to give up their city jobs and move back to the small farm where Tom grew up, they did it knowing they couldn't make the kind of living they wanted on just a few head of cattle and 40 tillable acres.

But they took with them their professional training and a plan to launch a business they now call Killbuck Valley Mushrooms, Ltd.

Located near Burbank, Ohio, the 7-year-old business turns out up to 300 lbs. of fresh mushrooms for sale per week to restaurant clientele and farmers market customers.

Their success recently won them recognition as the Outstanding Young Farm Couple of 2002 from the Ohio Farm Bureau Federation.

The Wiandts say their business has prospered because of their unique approach to mushroom production and their constant attention to marketing products.

Production at Killbuck Valley Mushrooms begins in a sterile on-farm laboratory, where Wendy puts her medical technology background to use in propagating mushrooms from tissue and spore samples.

Their materials and methods have allowed the lab to be certified organic which allows them to sell organic spawn to other mushroom growers, giving them a secondary income.

For their own production, they mix organic spawn with a fermented malt sugar solution and rye grain to make what they call "grain spawn."

For most of their mushrooms, grain spawn is inoculated onto chopped organically grown straw that has first been pasteurized to kill bacteria and 'wild' fungi. The straw is packed into 5-ft. long clear plastic tubes, which are then hung like columns in a high-humidity warm room for two or three weeks. When the first mushrooms begin popping out of holes poked through the plastic, the columns are moved into a fruiting room where the temperature is maintained at 60 to 75 degrees and humidity is kept high by spraying water onto the floor.

These hanging columns produce marketable mushrooms for two months or more.

Like dairy farmers, the Wiandts must head to the barn twice a day, every day, but in their case, it's to pick mushrooms.

They produce several colors (or varieties) of oyster mushrooms, as well as Wine Cap, Lions Mane and Blewit mushrooms. In the summer, they also produce shiitake mushrooms on hardwood logs.

Half of their production is sold at farm markets in Cleveland, Wooster, and Akron. The other half goes to chefs at restaurants in Akron and Cleveland. During the winter, nearly all of their sales go to restaurants. In addition to fresh mushrooms, they also sell dried mushrooms and canned mushrooms pickled in vinegar. Recipes are included with the packaged products.

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**Wendy and Tom Wiandt turn out up to 300 lbs. of fresh mushrooms for sale per week to restaurants and farmers markets.**



## Electric Scalders Clean Poultry Fast

Cynthia Willis likes to raise a small number of chickens and turkeys which she butchers and cans. However, scalding the larger birds for feather removal was her most daunting task until a farmer friend modified an old 50-gal. hot water tank into what Willis calls "a wonderful" home-made electric scalding.

"This unit allows me to thoroughly scald even the biggest turkeys with no problem," Willis says. "You can buy commercial scalders for more than \$900, but for people like me who have only a few birds, that's totally out of the question."

The home-built unit cost her only \$200 total (parts and labor). Willis picked up an old hot water heater at a junkyard for \$5 and took it to her friend who cut the bottom off and removed the element, replacing it with a 4,500-watt element.

Next, her friend flipped the tank upside-down and covered the exposed internal and external jacket with a metal lip, sealing it with silicone. He installed a \$100 external thermostat. The thermostat's bulb sensor is protected by a section of PVC pipe that Willis's friend added inside the tank of the scalding.

He then wired the unit so it could be plugged into a 220-volt outlet. Since the tank's cold water intake and outgoing hot water line accesses were now at the bottom of the tank, he installed an L-shaped section of pipe on one of them to allow for draining of the tank out to the side. This drain is closed with a threaded cap.

Willis's friend built one of these scalders for himself as well. He and his family are able to process 60 birds an hour with it.

"For chickens, I set the thermostat for 150 degrees Fahrenheit and for turkeys, I've found it needs to be at 160 degrees. I know from experience that if you have inadequate



Electric scalding was made by modifying an old 50-gal. hot water heater



Heater's original element was replaced with a 4,500-watt element. Thermostat's bulb sensor is protected by a section of PVC pipe added inside the tank.

heat treatment on turkeys, pulling feathers is a nightmare," says Willis.

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## On-Farm Bakery Uses Outdoor Oven

"We have more than doubled sales since building our outdoor brick oven," say Dora and Cornelius Friesen of Riverton, Manitoba. "The appeal of wholesome breads made in an on-farm setting is very strong and the outdoor oven just really complements the business."

The popular on-farm bakery specializes in naturally leavened breads made from grains like spelt and Kamut.

The Friesens started out baking just for themselves and then began marketing at their local Farmers' Market. Their breads were met with great enthusiasm and their business was born. They recently sold their grain and livestock operation and just kept the farm site.

They converted their double car garage into a bakeshop, setting up a commercial electric convection oven, which they still use for cookies and pastries. That oven was the basis of their operation for the first two years. Then they took a course on outdoor brick ovens and built one 25 ft. away from their bake shop.

"Our market had already been growing at a fast and steady rate, but once we started using the outdoor oven for all our bread, sales shot up dramatically," Dora says.

"The prevalence of wheat, dairy and yeast allergies makes our bread popular, since it's an alternative to wheat flour based breads. At the same time, people want to reconnect with the farm, the source of their food. Our goal is to be educators, as much as bakers," she says.

In addition to their production of baked goods, the Friesens round out the on-farm experience they offer by hosting tours for visitor groups and offer baking courses. Since they do have dogs, cats, sheep, chickens and a horse on their acreage, visitors usually express great joy at being able to see and touch some farm animals.

Every week during the summer, the Friesens put on a Friday "pizza night," where they have sold up to 60 pizzas fresh out of the oven in one night. According to the couple, it takes only five minutes to bake a pizza in their brick oven.

"When we attended the Brick Oven Bakers' Conference in San Francisco, there were



Dora and Cornelius Friesen operate an on-farm bakery. They say sales more than doubled once they installed this outdoor brick oven.



Outdoor brick oven is located about 25 ft. away from their bake shop.

61 American bakers and only four Canadian bakers in attendance," says Cornelius. "From our experience, we think there is room for a lot more businesses like ours around. The demand is certainly there."

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## Custom Grinding Business

Doug Crozier turned a Haybuster H1100 potato-powered tub grinder into a mobile grinder that he can take from farm to farm to do custom grinding, according to a recent article in *Grainews*.

Powered by a 425 hp Cat. engine, the Croziers built the trailer carrying the grinder from scratch.

Reception from cattle feeding neighbors has been good. Crozier notes that the big grinder allows them to blend feed that cattle normally wouldn't find palatable. With recent shortages of feed in his area, it allows farmers to find new uses for lower quality

bales by mixing it with silage, pellets, or grain. Wheat straw can be mixed in as filler.

The most difficult part of putting the mobile grinder together was reversing the direction of the driveshaft off the Cat engine using gearboxes.

Crozier points out that a commercial mobile grinder with the capacity of his machine would have cost \$130,000 or more. He spent much less than that by building it himself.

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