

Farm-Based Businesses Help Boost Incomes

If you're looking for new ways to add to your bottom line, take a look at the money-making ideas featured here and on the next page.

If you've found or heard about a new income-boosting idea, we'd like to hear about it. Send details to: FARM SHOW Magazine, P.O. Box 1029, Lakeville, Minn. 55044 (ph 800 834-9665) or E-mail us at: Editor@farmshow.com.

Knife Sharpening Business Pays Off

There's money to be made sharpening knives, either part or full-time, according to Wayne Dorsett. The Kirkland, Washington man has been supplementing his meat-cutting career with this part time knife sharpening for 15 years and says there are loads of opportunities for would-be sharpeners.

"This is the best part-time job I've ever had. There should be someone doing this in every community. It's easy to get accounts," he says. "I sharpen knives for grocery stores, cafes and restaurants and they generally want me to come back every month and sharpen them again. I work fulltime as a meat cutter, but have 20 knife sharpening accounts that I take care of in my spare time."

Dorsett touts himself as "the world's best knife sharpener." He uses the professional "Edge Pro Knife Sharpener" and approaches business owners or supermarket department managers, asking them if they'd like to have their knives sharpened. If they turn him down, he offers to sharpen one knife for free to show them what he can do. Dorsett tests a knife's sharpness by seeing how easily it cuts a thin sheet of paper from a writing tablet he brings with him.

His charges are: \$3.75 for a butcher knife, \$3.25 for a fillet knife and \$2.00 for a produce knife. Dorsett says some knives are easy and some take a little longer, but what matters most is that he does a quality job of sharpening.

"On average, I would say it takes about five minutes to sharpen a knife," he says. "The Edge Pro Knife Sharpener puts a perfect bevel on the knife. You can't go wrong."

Dorsett is also a dealer for the Edge Pro Knife Sharpener and sells the smaller, fold-up model that comes in a carrying case for \$130. The larger and faster model, which is what he uses for his business, sells for \$340.



There's money to be made sharpening knives, says Wayne Dorsett, who supplements his full-time meat-cutting job with a part time knife sharpening business.

"I've found that most of the people I deal with don't want to buy the sharpener. They just want a sharpening service. Even most meat cutters aren't interested in the machine. Just because a guy is a meat cutter doesn't mean he can sharpen knives, or wants to. I drive a car but can't fix one," he notes.

After initial contact with a client, he stops in to see them again in a month, checking to see if their knives need re-sharpening. Depending on their state, he can then decide how often they will require his services, whether it be monthly, or only every six weeks.

"I'd be glad to do anything I can to help anyone who thinks they'd be interested in starting this kind of business for themselves. All they have to do is call me with their questions," he says.

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Dairy farmers Rhonda and Mark Wethal go on the road to shows and fairs with this portable food stand. Mark put the rolling kitchen together himself.

Baked Potatoes Pay Off For Family

Dairy farmers Rhonda and Mark Wethal love to see people slather butter, sour cream and cheese on baked potatoes, especially when they're out on the road at shows and fairs with their portable food stand called, "The Farm Kitchen."

"We earn as much at four events lasting a few days each as I earned working a part time job, every day, all year long," says Rhonda.

One reason their food stand has been successful is their focus on food quality and quantity. Another is Mark's handyman abilities. He put the rolling kitchen together himself.

Mark gutted an 8 by 20-ft. cargo trailer and a 7 by 12-ft. supply trailer. He did all the construction, plumbing and electrical work on the new trailer, installing a 220-volt electrical system, water heater and an air conditioner.

"We wanted to do it right, so we had the public health officer come out and look it over," she says. "He couldn't believe we had done it all, and then he advised us to go to auctions for used restaurant equipment."

Careful shopping equipped the trailer with a deep fryer, griddle, steam table, sinks, proofing oven, freezer, two convection ovens and a new commercial refrigerator.

With their convection ovens, they can sell up to 240 baked potatoes an hour at \$3.50 each. That's not to mention other treats.

"We focus on baked potatoes, strawberry or hot fudge sundaes and now we have started serving chicken tenders," says Wethal. "We also make homemade soup, batter fried cheese curds and French Fries."

In addition to limiting menu items, the Wethals decided only to work events within 30 miles of home, and they only work at lunchtime. Greater distances and longer days would interfere with running their dairy farm. Rhonda also listens closely to the weather the week prior to an event, noting that cooler weather requires more supplies while hot weather cuts sales. Serving the community also means supporting local organizations.

"We never compete with a non-profit that has the same product," says Rhonda.

Like any retail business, location is everything. The Wethals' 30-mile rule allows them to serve food at the World Dairy Expo (90,000 plus attendees) and the Midwest Horse Fair (50,000) as well as two local fairs. Thanks to quality and quantity, there is plenty of demand and plenty of repeat customers.

"We always tell the kids to use as much toppings as they want," says Rhonda.

At one event last year, she discovered her daughter had put up a sign advertising a baked potato with all the fixings. It was a potato covered with sour cream, butter, bacon, chili and broccoli in a cheddar cheese sauce. It filled the 2.5-lb. tray.

"People said it looked gross, but tasted great," recalls Rhonda. "We are always going to shows and seminars and looking for ideas of what to sell."

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Custom Fruit Processors Make Jam For Others

Chuck and Monica Cox make a living on leftovers.

Their company, Wilhelm Foods, custom processes excess berries and fruits (and occasionally tomatoes) produced by growers around Newberg, Oregon into jellies, jams, preserves, juices and syrups that the growers can then sell at roadside stands and farmers markets along with their fresh produce.

It all started about 20 years ago when, Chuck says, they were barely getting by on his earnings from managing a pick-your-own berry operation on Wilhelm Farms, near Tualatin, Washington.

"We grew more berries than customers could pick, and they were going to waste," Cox says.

Chuck and Monica decided those excess berries could be the key to finding the extra income they needed.

With farm owners Gene and Jackie Wilhelm, they purchased equipment to process small batches of berries into jams and jellies and then set up a commercial kitchen in what had once served as a lambing shed. The organized this operation into a new company named Wilhelm Foods.

Their first successful product was strawberry jam. They proceeded on to blueberry and blackberry products.

Cox recalls that getting to those first jars of jam required a bit of trial and error. He says Wilhelm Farm pigs lived well on their mistakes for awhile.

Despite early setbacks, the Coxes eventually learned to make very good products that nearly walked off the shelves at the Wilhelm Farms produce stand.

Eventually, they began processing for other growers, too. In 1988, the Wilhelmss sold their

interest in the processing business to the Coxes, who moved the operation off the farm and into Newberg.

Today, nearly all of their products are labeled with a grower's or retailer's private label. The company's nearly 100 customers can provide their own produce, or select from top quality fruits and berries the Coxes buy from area growers. Customers also have the option of providing their own recipe or going with one from Wilhelm Foods.

Cox says larger canneries can process for less per container, but they're not able to process small quantities needed by individual growers and specialty stands.

"We're prepared to process anywhere from 100 lbs. of fruit and up," he says. "We can do smaller quantities, but it takes 100 to 120 lbs. to get consistent quality."

He says 120 lbs. of produce will make

about 14 cases of 12-oz. jars of jam or jelly. He says they can turn orders around in as little as two days. The complexity of the recipe and the type of jar used determine costs. They range from \$16 to \$25 per case.

Wilhelm Foods will also custom design and print labels, but Cox notes that many customers are now using computers and laser printers to create their own labels.

"Our niche is jams and jellies made from fruits and berries," he says. "We can't compete with vegetable processors. Nobody wants to buy a \$5 jar of corn, but people do spend that much on jars of jelly or jam, especially if they intend to use it as a gift."

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