

Money-Making Ideas To Boost Farm Income



Dennis and JoAnn Dickman raise 4,000 chickens on three acres of land using a portable building with a fenced-in area that rotates weekly.

Large-Scale Pastured Chicken Operation Doing Well

Looking for “chickens so fresh they’ll embarrass you”? Just follow the map to Dennis and JoAnn Dickman’s Herscher, Ill. farm.

They pasture-raise 4,000 chickens a year on three acres using a portable building that moves around every month and a fenced-in area that rotates weekly, providing fresh grass needed for “pasture raising.”

In addition, Dennis mixes his own feed made from ground corn, oats, roasted soybeans and fishmeal.

JoAnn says next year, they want to increase their flock by about 30 percent.

They sell their birds and other products at local farmers markets and in their own farm store. In addition to whole processed birds, they sell multi-colored sweet corn, turkey summer sausage, chicken bratwurst, chicken apple sausage, chicken stix and, of course, eggs.

Those opening a carton of the Dickmans’ eggs for the first time are in for a surprise because JoAnn puts a green egg into each dozen. “They’re a little shocked. And I tell them, ‘You’ve read Dr. Seuss’s Green Eggs and Ham to your children. There are green eggs. You just thought that was a story,’” she says. Some don’t like the egg because the mind plays tricks and they think it’s green inside. She assures them it’s not.

Of their 200 layer hens, 30 are Araucana



JoAnn feeds the birds a mix of ground corn, oats, soybeans and fishmeal.

which produce different colored eggs.

This year, the Dickmans offered a new product that JoAnn calls “Cluckers,” which are lightly seasoned chicken patties.

Keeping everything reasonably priced is important to JoAnn. The Dickmans sell birds for \$2.99/lb. whole and \$3.29 cut up. Every year, she tells customers to expect a 4 percent price increase. “People who know good food will gladly pay for it.”

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Dennis and JoAnn Dickman, 6480 S 14000 W Road, Herscher, Ill. 60941 (ph 815 426-2154; email: djdickman@netzero.net; website: www.dickmans.net).

Direct-Market Directories Help Consumers Find Farmers

Across the country and around the world, more and more small farmers are linking up directly with consumers, thanks in part to the internet and also to a growing desire by people to get “closer to their food.”

Some states are making it easier for farmers and consumers to hook up by publishing directories of farmers who sell direct. We recently came across directories in both Illinois and Minnesota.

Elizabeth Burns, a small-scale farmer herself, helped create this year’s directory with the University of Illinois. She says the school sees direct-marketing as a way for small and medium scale farmers to boost on-farm profits.

Each listing in the directory includes the name of the farm, location, contact information and what they have to offer. The directory is also online at <http://illinoisfarmdirect.com>.

Minnesota’s directory, sponsored by the Minnesota Department of Agriculture, can also be found online at www.minnesotagrown.com.



Printed publication (it’s also online) lists farmers who sell directly to consumers.

Contact: The Land Connection, P.O. Box 197, Goodfield, Ill. 62742; website: www.illinoisfarmdirect.org.



“Chick-Inn Hutch” is a lightweight canvas-topped shelter. Curtains on the side roll up easily on the sides to provide ventilation.

Free-Range Bird Shelters

Raising free range chickens and other poultry is easy with the “Chick-Inn Hutch” manufactured by ClearSpan in South Windsor, Conn.

The lightweight canvas-topped shelters come in sizes ranging from 8 by 8 ft. to 14 by 24 ft., with 9 ft. of headroom inside.

Frames are made from 14-ga. 1.66-in. structural steel tubing. They nest on a wood base provided by the buyer. Flooring can be added or the unit can be skidded around regularly to fresh grass.

Poultry or game birds are protected within the shelter by 5-ft. high walls made from 1 in. by 2-in. galvanized wire. The roof, side curtains and end panels are made from white 12 1/2 oz. rip-stop polyethylene fabric. The curtains roll up easily on the sides, providing ventilation. There’s a double zippered

36-in. by 80-in. aluminum-framed door at one end. It can be rolled up to allow the birds to roam freely during the day if desired.

The shelters range in price from \$499 to \$1,195 plus shipping and handling. ClearSpan sells a variety of other animal and poultry housing packages, including “Moo-Tel Calf Hutches,” “Super Moo-Tels” and the “Colossal Chick-Inn Hutch,” which has room for up to 1,200 birds.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, ClearSpan, Corporate and Sales Headquarters, 1395 John Fitch Blvd., South Windsor, Ct. 06074 (ph 800 603-4445 or 860 289-7261; fax 800 457-8887 or 860 289-4711; email: ClearSpan@clearspan.com; website: www.farmtek.com).

Chicken Pluckers Make Selling Poultry Easier

Pick’n feathers is the toughest part of getting chickens from the feeder to the freezer. Pickwick & Knase has equipment that makes the job fast for any size operation.

“We have equipment to do one bird at a time or 300 an hour,” says Tom Knase, owner of the company. “People get started raising 30 birds for themselves and then a couple hundred to sell to friends and some expand to a couple thousand a year.”

At the bottom end of the poultry processing line is a tabletop scalding unit like the \$190 30-gal. PKES Electric Scalding Unit that makes feathers easy to pluck. A tabletop picker sells for \$170 without a motor or \$470 with a motor. It can defeather a bird in one to two minutes.

At the other end of the line there’s an automatic scalding unit at \$6,200 that dips up to five chickens at a time in boiling water. Once scalded, the five birds can be dropped into large drum-type chicken pluckers like the \$4,600 Spin-Pik Jr. Batch Picker. In 20 seconds they are plucked clean, including pinfeathers, and ready to be butchered.

Chicken pluckers simply consist of a series of rotating rollers with rubber fingers. The fingers pull on the feathers as they rotate against the skin, rubbing the feathers away from the skin.

“Much of the equipment was designed in the early 1930’s and hasn’t changed much,” says Knase. “The chicken plucker is a very simple machine with not much that can go wrong. People are often amazed at how well it will pull the feathers out of a bird.”

Other equipment offered by the company in their catalog and on their website includes stunning knives, gizzard peelers,



Knase sells a variety of sizes of chicken pluckers.



Scalding makes feather easy to pluck.

overhead shackle lines, powered eviscerators and worktables. Everything from a knife for sticking a bird to plastic bags to freeze it is available.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Tom Knase, Pickwick & Knase, 7887 Fuller Road, Suite 116, Eden Prairie, Minn. 55344-2100 (ph 800 808-3335 or 952 906-3333; fax 952 906-3335; website: www.pickwickknase.com).