

# Money-Making Ideas To Boost Farm Income

## Strawberry Patch Yields College Fund

When Dennis and Terry Hand of Fillmore, Ill., thought about how to get their five girls through college, they didn't think about scholarship, loans and work study. They thought "strawberries."

Dennis is an entrepreneurial sort of guy who, with his brother Bernard, farms and runs a roofing business. He figured he could make a berry operation work, too.

Hand, with the help of his wife, Terry, and daughters Ida, 12; Taylor, 11; Devon, 9; Kali, 6; and Emma, 15 months, work the patch to produce a long-term profit.

In 2003, they turned about an acre of pasture into a 7,000-plant strawberry patch. In order to produce better quality berries in the future, they didn't sell any that first year.

The Hands sell three varieties of berries: Honeoye, which is an early variety, and Jewel and Allstar, which produce berries later in the season. While some visitors claim the Honeoye is sweeter than the rest,

Terry isn't sure. "They taste the same to me," she says.

Because of good weather this year, the season started on May 13 and yielded three weeks of production which was sold at farmers markets and other area locations. Depending on the weather, "strawberry picking season" is between 3 and 4 weeks long.

The patch is both a U-pick and ready picked. The Hands charge \$1.00 per lb. for those wanting to pick their own strawberries. Grandpa Alfred Hand works the farmer's markets. Grandma Eloise boxes berries and waits on customers.

Terry says the patch doesn't take too much work and isn't costly to maintain because they have most of the equipment needed. To keep the strawberries from growing too many stringers, she says they cultivate the patch. The girls help with that along with weeding and picking the berries.

Their business fits well with the community's initiative to encourage direct



Dennis Hand, with the help of his wife, Terry, and their five girls, turned an acre of pasture into a 7,000-plant strawberry patch. The profits go toward college expenses.

marketing of pasture fed broilers, eggs produced by hens on the pasture and pastured beef.

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Valerie Van Kooten entertains crowds across the Midwest with her down-home wit. She bases her presentations on her writings over the past 15 years which focus on the humorous, exasperating and poignant moments of farm life.



## Rural Gal Specializes In Feminine Farm Humor

Farming is a laughable career, and that's what makes it bearable sometimes. You can either let it drive you crazy, or you can find humor in it.

Valerie Van Kooten was raised on a farm near Pella, Iowa, and admits it was her sister, not her, who inherited the farming genes in the family.

"About the only thing I ever mastered was 'farmer time,'" Van Kooten jokes. "If Dad said he needed us for 15 minutes, we figured an hour. If he said he needed us for an hour, we blocked out the whole morning."

Van Kooten, who has been a writer and editor for the past 20 years, is now entertaining crowds across the Midwest, with her down-home wit. She calls herself "The Reluctant Farm Girl," and bases her presentations on her writings over the past 15 years which focus on the humorous, exasperating and poignant moments of farm life.

She learned at a young age about "Murphy's Laws Concerning Farm Life": "Cows always get out 15 minutes before you're ready to leave on vacation; hogs quickly decide who's the weakest link and will surge that way; hay mows make the best haunted houses; and all-girl bean-walking brigades are the best, because then you can peel down the tube top and get a real tan."

Anyone who has chased hogs in their "good" clothes, detassled corn on a swel-

tering summer day, or lived with husbands who have International tastes on a toy tractor budget, will be tuned in to Van Kooten's brand of humor.

While growing up, she did her share of the farm work, and was even named the 1980 Marion County Pork Queen, but Van Kooten admits she "just wasn't well, very good at it."

Instead, her skills have turned out to be far more impressive in the communications field, having had her writings published in REC News, The Des Moines Register, Successful Farming, Acreage, Farm Bureau Spokesman, and The Iowan, among others. People across the country write to her requesting copies of her work.

Besides her "Reluctant Farm Girl" presentation, Van Kooten offers two other equally funny talk themes: "Mothers Shouldn't Have to Clean the Cat Box," and "Growing Up Dutch."

She graduated from Iowa State University and besides being a mother of three, Van Kooten currently teaches technical writing at Central College in Pella. Her husband, Kent, is parts manager for McCormick International USA, and collects antique farm machinery.

"You can take the girl off the farm, and please do!" she says.

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Mark Schottman says his self-propelled sweet corn harvester is paying off. The 1-row machine can harvest 80 to 90 dozen ears in only about six minutes.

## Update On Sweet Corn Harvester

By C.F. Marley, Contributing Editor

I recently stopped by to follow up with Mark Schottman on his self-propelled sweet corn harvester featured in FARM SHOW two years ago (Vol. 26, No. 5). It was built by his neighbors, Roger and Bruce Elliott, well-known innovators who have been featured in FARM SHOW numerous times. The one-row, self-propelled machine can harvest 80 to 90 dozen ears in only about six minutes.

The 2-WD, hydraulic-driven machine measures 25 ft. long, 12 ft. wide and rides on four 26-in. high flotation tires. The operator sits on a platform between the front wheels. After the ears are stripped from the stalk, they fall onto a conveyor equipped with poly paddles and a slippery poly bottom. The conveyor drops the ears into a large wooden hopper on back of the machine. There, an employee removes any stalkage that may still be attached to the ear.

The machine's chassis, engine and hydrostatic transmission, front and rear axle, and drive train all came off an International Harvester 1440 combine that had been in a fire.

Schottman says the harvester is paying off. This year he planted 30 acres of sweet corn,

staggering the harvesting dates all the way to mid September. When the photo was taken in mid July, he had some corn coming along that was still only at shoe top height. Packaging and marketing the sweet corn is "Where it's at," says Schottman. He sells the corn to local stores and at farmer's markets, as well as at roadside stands. The corn retails at \$3 per dozen.

Word of mouth advertising works the best, he says. And he's benefiting more from it all the time.

The sweet corn harvester is virtually unchanged from two years ago. It can be operated by a crew of three, but an extra hand really helps out.

The weather this summer was very favorable with rains coming just when they were needed. Schottman has prepared for dry times, though. He has irrigation equipment and a pond that will hold enough water for one inch over 40 acres.

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