"Soda Blaster" Business Catching On Fast

By C. F. Marley, Contributing Editor

Charles and Alice Klein of Columbia, Ill., are proud owners of a SodaBlaster, a trailer-mounted cleaning machine which they bought last spring. They like the way it cleans vintage tractors which have been subject to years of neglect. The Kleins are serious collectors owning many antique tractors and cars. They use their SodaBlaster mostly to restore their own tractors, but also have a thriving sideline business doing work for others in the area.

Tony Smock of St. Joseph, Mo., who is a SodaBlaster distributor, says other tractor restorers around the country have also taken a shine to the SodaBlaster.

The SodaBlaster uses the same idea as a sand blaster, but it hurls baking soda instead of sand. Users say it does as good a job of stripping off paint as sand, but does much less damage to the metal underneath. The idea isn't new but is gaining in popularity (see FARM SHOW's Vol. 23, No. 4).

The machine the Kleins own comes with a self-contained air compressor on front and cooling fans on one side. It holds two bags of soda, which dump into a small tank on back of the trailer.

The Kleins say the Soda Blasting process is ideal for cleaning all types of delicate equipment. It eliminates the need for sanding, scrubbing, and abrasive blasting. But unlike sand blasting, the air has to be cooled or you'll end up with a mess of gunk.

Smock says the soda blast system easily removes carbon, grease, oils, gasket materials, surface corrosion, paint and coatings from a variety of alloys, plastics and other surfaces without damage.

The soda blasting idea originated several years ago as a way to clean the Statue of Liberty. The "skin" of the statue is about the thickness of a nickel, and it had about five coats of paint on it. To use a sand blaster would have meant destroying the skin.

When FARM SHOW recently called the Kleins they had just finished soda blasting a Deere 720 tractor and were ready to prime and paint it. It took three hours to soda blast the tractor. "We don't like using a sand blaster because the sand gets in bearings and other cracks and crevices. Then, when you paint, the sand splatters all over and messes up the paint job," says Alice.

Alice says Soda Blasters were used extensively to remove mold from houses after Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans.""A big advantage of using baking soda is that it's environmentally friendly. It doesn't contaminate the soil and breaks down grease so well there's no need for a big cleanup."

Charles Klein with a handful of soda that he uses with his trailer-mounted "Soda Blaster" cleaning machine. Unit cleans with baking soda instead of sand.

The Kleins bought their Soda Blaster last spring for about $40,000. They buy soda bags by the pallet full. "It's a big investment but we think it will pay off over time. We charge by the bag instead of by the hour, at a rate of $50 per bag. So far we've soda blasted a total of six tractors since we bought the unit. Usually farmers bring their tractor to us. Sometimes they bring fenders or other components. We even soda blasted a Corvette for a customer."

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Sales Boom For Members Of Online Co-Op Food

When Bob Waldrop started buying feed direct from farmers, he liked the idea so much he decided to get more involved. He set up a website that others could access to order direct from the same farmers. As more people accessed the system and more farmers offered products, the informal network grew until the Oklahoma Food Co-op was born.

"We had 35 members in November 2003 and grossed $3,000 in sales," says Waldrop. "Today we're grossing up to $25,000 each month and have 834 members. We only sell food and other items produced in Oklahoma."

What is most unique about the co-op is that this is no neighborhood venture. It's a statewide effort but there's no building. Members place orders online, by phone, by mail or by email each week, and producers deliver products packaged by order to a central location in Oklahoma City.

Volunteers sort products by member order, and batches of orders are delivered by volunteers to 16 locations around the state where local members pick up their orders. If members are ill or disabled, orders are delivered to the home for free; otherwise there is a home delivery charge.

From the few homegrown foods and producers Waldrop discovered, the co-op now lists more than 1,200 products from nearly 80 producers. Products include everything from beef, pork and cheese to goat's milk soap, creams and detergents to barbecue sauce, wood works and clothing.

The key to its success is a very efficient software package that has a database for producers and product listings. It even has inventory control, so if a producer lists 10 items for sale, once 10 are sold, no more orders can be placed for the product. The software also produces invoices for both customer and producer.

One decision the Oklahoma Food Co-op made early was to self-finance, and Waldrop says money has never been a problem. Each member pays a one-time $50 fee. In addition, the co-op charges producers 5 percent and members 5 percent on each transaction.

The Oklahoma Food Co-op sells food and other items through a website.

"We didn't apply for grants, as they required administration time, and that is our scarcest resource," says Waldrop, who works full time as the director of music at a local church. "By self financing, we are under our own control."

The co-op board of directors, with Waldrop as president, is considering setting up a storefront operation. To do so, he estimates they will need at least twice their current monthly sales. If they do it, it will no doubt be like their existing business, invented from scratch.

Waldrop says the co-op is happy to work with groups in other states wishing to set up a similar online system. They've already done so in Nebraska and Texas. After all, he notes, the software has already been developed.

"It's always easy to find consumers," he says. "Organizers need to buy local to find out what's available and what's good. The second step is to start a website. Third is to set up an organizational committee of producers and customers."

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Kikos Make Great Meat Goats

Good mothers, good milkers and multiple births make Kiko goats a good choice for meat production. They are also great for cross breeding, says Michael Wade, Kiko producer and vice president of the International Kiko Goat Association (IKGA). Cross breeding is important, as Wade estimates there are only about 2,800 pure blood Kikos in the U.S.

"They were developed in New Zealand in the 1980's. About 100 were brought here in 1992 and expanded through cross breeding. We've been told there are none left in New Zealand," says Wade.

Kikos were developed by crossing feral New Zealand goats with dairy goats. The hope was to harness feral goat hardiness and vigor while increasing their size and milk production to support multiple births.

The original breeding program selected for growth with no supplemental feeding or hoof trimming. Goats with foot problems were culled. Wade says the effort succeeded.

"I started breeding Boer goats and had problems with parasites, pneumonia, poor mothering and bad feet," he says. "I saw an article on Kikos and started breeding them. I haven't had a sick goat in years or problems with parasites or feet. They are very prolific and can kid on their own."

Kiko breeders select for twinning with most does culled if they produce two singles in two years. Wade maintains the breed is very low maintenance, especially when given a variety of forage and browse to select from.

Wade runs his goats at about five head per acre. He suggests that the biggest problem in goat production is over grazing. "People will put 20 to 30 goats per acre and end up with parasite problems," he says. "With enough good forage and minerals, they can pick out what they need. Sometimes they will eat a plant in the spring, but they won't eat the same plant in the fall."

In the New Zealand program, Kiko kids were compared to Romney lambs that gained 0.35 lbs. per day. The Kikos gained 0.36 lbs. Wade says the fast growth is another reason he made the switch to Kikos.

Kiko goats were developed by crossing feral New Zealand goats with dairy goats.

"My kids reach 50 lbs. at four months without grain, which is a good size for market kids," he says. "Dr. Richard Browning, an animal scientist at Tennessee State University, has shown that the Kiko produces a higher rate of gain than Boer and Spanish goats."

Because the Kiko breed started with a relatively small number, most purebreds in the U.S. and Canada have been bred up by crossing with other breeds and then backcrossing with Kiko bucks to a point of 94 percent or higher Kiko blood. By the fourth generation, they're considered purebred.

Breeders with original purebred New Zealand Kikos on both male and female sides sell their breeding stock at a premium. Offspring from the so called New Zealand Kikos, numbering about 800 registered in North America, sell for $500 to $10,000 for bucks or does. Purebred bucks and does produced by back crossing to Kiko bloodlines will sell for up to $1,000.

As part of an effort to promote the Kiko as a source for hybrid vigor, the IKGA promotes a 3/4 Kiko and 1/4 Boer cross trademarked as the "American Meat Maker." Half Boer, half Kiko kids are marketed under the BoKi trademark name.

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