

Money-Making Ideas To Boost Farm Income

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 email us at: editor@farmshow.com.



Old barns shouldn't be left to rot and fall down, says barn restorer Bruce Willemsen.

Barn Restorer Brings Old Structures Back To Life

Professional barn restorer Bruce Willemsen says if people aren't going to fix up their old barns they should tear them down and use the lumber for other purposes. What the builder hates to see is barns left to rot and fall down.

"We have more than 70 barns on our list to be restored," says Willemsen. "We also build new barns."

Willemsen has torn down barns in the past, numbering each beam so it can be reassembled in the future. "We have a pile of old barns, down and labeled, but there's not much of a market for them," he says.

While some people want to remodel a barn for other uses, many simply want to restore old barns to their former glory.

"We tighten up and refit beams," says Willemsen. "We use steel brackets to replace joints where pins have rotted out or the tenon gone bad. Often the roof goes bad, and then you get rotten spots."

Willemsen notes that old barns, especially large ones, were built to be filled with hay, which put down pressure on all the joints. Without the hay, the joints spread and the barn loses its spring. He notes that straight and gambrel-roofed barns can often be straightened as long as the foundation hasn't gone bad.

Knowing when to tear down, when to restore and then what to use a barn for when restored are all difficult questions to answer. Each barn is unique, and so is each barn owner's situation. One thing Willemsen doesn't care for is trying to turn a barn into something it isn't.

"I had one owner who wanted me to put 18-ft. doors in an old barn so he could drive a combine into it," recalls Willemsen. "I told him to build a pole shed. It would do the job better and at less cost. Take a big old barn and put an airplane door in it, and it just looks stupid."

Which isn't to say he hasn't turned old barns into machine sheds. When he does, he tries to do it in a way that preserves its style.

"When we work on a barn, we do everything historically correct up to and including using hand cut nails," says Willemsen. "We try to use new wood, all solid hardwoods and big ponderosa pines. We get our wood from small family-run sawmills. We also use a lot of local hardwoods."

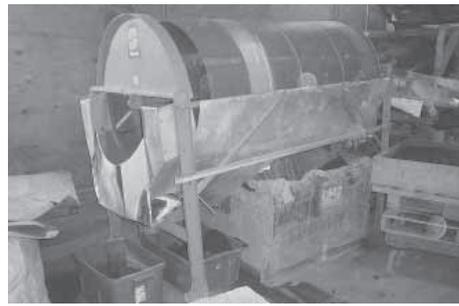
While every barn is different, the barn builder/restorer says the average barn restoration will run about the cost of a two to three car garage, or \$20,000 to 30,000. How historically accurate or elaborate the restoration is determines the price, along with the shape the barn is in.

"There is no right or wrong answer to when to restore," says Willemsen. "Sometimes it's because Grandpa built it 100 years ago. Sometimes it's because people bought the place and just want to fix it up. It's great when they can be put back to work. Everybody loves an old barn."

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Barn restored to its former glory.



Each week Lynda Schmidt's "worm farm" pumps out three tons of castings, which she calls "black gold". The fertilizer retails for \$12.95 or more for a 20-liter bag.

Tiny Wigglers Produce 3 Tons Of "Black Gold" Per Week

Lynda Schmidt knows worms and how to make money from them. Each week her "worm farm" pumps out three tons of castings that she calls "black gold". The increasingly popular fertilizer retails for \$12.95 or more for a 20-liter bag. It's a business she practically fell into, but one she has fallen in love with.

"I knew nothing about the worm casting production until I ran across this business four years ago," she says. "I was amazed by it."

Because the previous owners had been concentrating on another business, production was down to 1 1/2 yards per week. As she learned the business, she built production back up to the current high. Although she sells much of her production in bulk quantities, she is slowly shifting to retail distribution as demand grows.

Currently she keeps 85 4 by 4-ft. bins active with approximately 25 lbs. of large African night crawlers in each. Each bin is refilled with worm food about every two weeks. At the end of the two weeks, the castings pass through a screening process, the bins are refilled and the worms are returned to work.

Schmidt prefers African night crawlers to red wigglers, which are more common in vermicomposting, even though they are more finicky.

"They need to be kept at 78 to 82 degrees, but the barn was built for that with in-floor heat. With the barn's good insulation, it doesn't take much energy," she says. "They are very productive and produce 20 babies per cocoon compared to three to five in a standard earthworm cocoon."

Schmidt collects the cocoons and raises her own replacement stock, something that took her a couple of years to perfect, she says. Once in production, she babies her worms with a secret recipe of humic peat and four grains. The special peat, which is the layer found just above the seam of coal in bogs, is very clean and consistent. It is shredded,



Castings pass through a screening process.

screened and mixed with the milled grains.

"Some of my customers use our worm castings to make plant tea brewed with special sugars and enzymes," says Schmidt. "They can't have any wild bacteria in it, so we need to have a clean process throughout."

An active promoter of worm castings, Schmidt hosts tours of her facilities, a gardeners' festival with composting workshops, and even a Halloween party for area kids.

"It is amazing how well it works with turf, and golf courses are picking up on that," she says. "It has a slow release that promotes natural enzymes and microbes and deep root growth. It also seems to help fight molds."

Schmidt recommends spreading 10 liters per 100 sq. ft. for turf, 10 percent worm castings in potting soil mixes and a handful of castings into the hole when transplanting seedlings.

"It has an amazing effect on germination," she says.

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An active promoter of worm castings, Schmidt hosts tours of her facilities.