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He Uses Spinach As A Natural Cure For Meat

Certified organic farmer Doug Anderson cures the meat he produces using spinach. His system was approved by the USDA last year, and it's allowing him to satisfy customers who're looking for chemical-free organic products with a longer shelf life.

Anderson operates Beaver Creek Ranch at Grantsburg, Wis. His system bypasses the usual method for curing meats.

Spinach contains high levels of a natural nitrate and, when used to cure meat, produces a color and taste similar to conventionally cured meats. However because of current federal regulations, Anderson's spinach-treated products must be labeled as "un-cured." That's because by definition, cured meats must contain sodium nitrite.

"We vacuum pack our products and, as long as they're stored at 40 degrees F, the shelf life of our spinach-cured meat appears to be unlimited," says the 70-year-old Anderson. "I'm working to get the la-

beling legislation changed."

He grows his own spinach along with beef, turkey, chicken and pork. He sells his processed meat direct to restaurants, food cooperatives and health food stores from Grand Marais, Minn., to Eau Claire, Wis.

Currently, Anderson uses the spinach-curing system on bacon, turkey legs and deboned hams. He worked together with Ye Olde Butcher Shoppe in Rochester, Minn., to develop the spinach process.

Anderson also produces uncured (no spinach) beef sticks and summer sausage.

Though his farm is certified organic, Anderson says the livestock are not. This is because there's no certified organic slaughterhouse within a reasonable distance of his farm.

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Classic Bells Generate Worldwide Demand

Restoring antique horse and sleigh bells is a business that's grown steadily over the past six years for Chuck Kelly and DeeAnna Weed of Postville, Iowa.

The couple has filled orders from all over North America, as well as from Australia, Britain, Belgium and Northern Europe.

They specialize in heirloom bell straps and creating custom designs with antique bells. Calling their business "Classic Bells," the couple uses antique bells from their own large inventory or heirloom bells supplied by the customer.

They purchase bells at flea markets, off the internet and directly from people they meet.

"I don't know anybody else who does what we do," Chuck says. "Our website drives our business. There would probably be no way to do this without it."

Classic Bells is a part-time business during summer months, but between October 1 and February 1, it morphs into a full-time entity, "even though we both have other full-time jobs, too," Chuck points out.

"We're usually able to fill most small orders in two to three business days. This includes orders for Santa's sleigh bells, door straps, antique straps, and ready-made items. But you have to allow six to eight weeks for us to complete large custom projects."

Recently, the couple added some new items to their product list for "horse folk." They now make home decor and equestrian gift items without sleigh bells on them. These include: leather covered horseshoes and "Doc Hammill's adapters for driving lines".

The idea for Classic Bells sprouted when, some years ago, Chuck was looking for sleigh bells for the couple's Norwegian Fjord horses, according to DeeAnna.

"He didn't like the weight or sound of the new bells, but the old ones were not usually in good enough shape to use on a horse," she says. "After searching in vain for someone



Chuck Kelly and DeeAnna Weed specialize in restoring heirloom bell straps and creating custom designs with antique bells.

who would restore old sleigh bells for him, he realized there was no one to do it. Chuck heard from folks who waited years to get their sleigh bells back from harness makers. Others told him about paying high prices for careless workmanship, cheap leather and hardware, and poorly polished bells."

Intrigued by the engineering problem of learning how to efficiently, gently and thoroughly clean, polish and preserve sleigh bells, the enterprising couple determined to teach himself.

The typical cost to have Classic Bells clean, polish and lacquer a bell is \$3, but the fee is flexible according to how much work is requested, according to Kelly. Some people just want them cleaned and not polished, or polished very little and not lacquered.

The Classic Bells website also serves as an informative resource for many articles about all aspects of sleigh bells.

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Butterfly Farm Caught On Fast

Tom and Donna Pless say their 6-year old butterfly farm has become so popular they're already turning down school groups who want to visit in May.

"April, May, September and October are our busiest months," says Tom Pless. "Other months are starting to get busier now, too."

He and his wife are making plans for day camps to build summer business. Kids who attend would get more in-depth training in how to work with monarch butterflies and the milkweed they depend on. Pless knows that getting kids to the butterfly farm is often the first step to getting entire families to visit.

The family is following a 5-6 year business plan they developed before starting. While they could expand faster, they choose to let the business pay for itself as it goes, says Pless.

"We have other things we're planning to do, but we don't want to move too fast," he says.

The heart and soul of the farm is a 20 by 48-ft. screened flight house. It contains dozens of blooming plants and hundreds of monarchs. It also contains numerous milkweed plants, where female Monarchs lay their eggs and young caterpillars eat their fill.

"My wife loves to raise the butterflies,

and I love to present information about them," says Pless. "I am always surprised how much the adults seem to enjoy the presentations. Of course it isn't a boring lecture. It is a hands on experience, so most people get into it."

School visits and adult group visits spill over into other income opportunities for the Plesses. They host birthday parties, supply butterflies for releases at weddings and even at funerals, where the monarchs often settle on the flowers around the casket.

"People who have released butterflies at a funeral tell us that afterwards they often think of their loved one when they see a butterfly," says Pless. "We have also donated butterflies to hospices. It really becomes a ministry."

Butterflies for release are priced by quantity. A set of four packets with four monarchs in each costs \$120 plus shipping. A release of 50 in one container suggested for receptions is priced at \$350. Farm visits are priced at \$4 for children and \$5 for adults.

So far, they haven't had to do any advertising. News stories have spread the word helped along by a few unique events.

"We had a young woman from the University of North Carolina come down to produce a story for the campus TV station," says Pless. "Later she submitted it to MSNBC, and it got picked up nationally."

Helping out others has also paid back in more than sales. Last summer, the Plesses



Butterflies live in a 20 by 48-ft. screened flight house that contains dozens of blooming plants and hundreds of monarchs. Kids are always welcome (below).

worked with the Make-A-Wish Foundation to host an event on the farm. Tickets were sold with the money going to the foundation. Restaurants and a winery set up booths and gave the profits to the foundation. Many people were introduced to the farm, but that wasn't the biggest dividend, says Pless.

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