

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](mailto:editor@farmshow.com).

### Family Thrives On CSA Farm

By Dee Goerge

Gary Brever compares running a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farm to competing in an extreme sport. In the heat of the vegetable growing season the work is intense, requiring physical, mental, and emotional energy to juggle seeding, harvesting, washing, packing, and making deliveries.

But, with a potential gross income of \$6,000 to \$10,000 an acre, it's a way that more and more producers are choosing to make a living in agriculture. Produce is marketed directly to customers, who pay for weekly deliveries of fresh food throughout the growing season.

In 2002, Brever and his wife, Jennifer, bought 160 acres near Parkers Prairie, Minn., and started growing vegetables for an area farmers market. The following year they signed up 40 CSA members. The membership doubled each of the next two years. This year, their CSA, Ploughshare Farm, has 175 members with about one-fourth within 30 miles and the rest in larger cities including St. Cloud, Minneapolis and St. Paul.

Members pick up their produce at six drop-off sites. They pay for shares in the spring - \$425 to \$465, depending on delivery distance. Each share - 18 to 20 weeks of vegetables weighing from 10 to 25 pounds - consists of enough food to feed a family of four. Half shares are also available (\$325 and \$365), and Ploughshare Farm offers winter frozen shares (100 pounds/\$345) and winter storage shares (160 pounds/\$235).

To fill orders, the Brevers plant 13 acres (additional acres are in cover crops for rotation) and follow spreadsheets that outline what and when to plant. Planting begins in March in a hoophouse and continues throughout the summer, so new plants can be set out in the garden every couple of weeks for continuous harvest. Garlic is the last thing to be planted in the garden in October.

The Brevers plant about 50 kinds of vegetables - from the basics (beans, corn, tomatoes, carrots) - to a little more exotic (arugula, fennel, radicchio). Altogether there are about 150 varieties - 15 in tomatoes alone. With each week's package, the Brevers send a newsletter updating customers on the garden, as well as offering recipe ideas.

Brever notes that CSAs are about more than just good food. It's about developing a relationship between the producer and the customers, as well as educating people about the risks and successes of agriculture. Twice a season, the Brevers invite CSA members for a picnic/work day on Ploughshare Farm.

"The hard - and the exciting - part is that you wear all these different hats," Brever says. "You must be a farmer, marketer, advocate, educator, and manager. After five years, Ploughshare Farm has developed routines to improve efficiencies and set standards for interns and part-time work-



Gary and Jennifer Brever started their farm operation in 2002, selling to local community members.

ers. For example, the Brevers use a roller system for packing boxes. Each worker has a couple of items they place in the boxes as they go by.

Here are other challenges and lessons Brever notes about operating a CSA:

- Work on another CSA farm to gain experience. Start small. Gather information about CSAs. Check out [www.wilson.edu/wilson/asp/content.asp?id=1275](http://www.wilson.edu/wilson/asp/content.asp?id=1275) for resources and information about CSA founder Robyn Van En. Or go to [www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/csa](http://www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/csa) to connect with related websites about CSAs across the U.S. Brever finds useful information for his region at [www.macsac.org](http://www.macsac.org).

- Know your customers' needs. The first year the Brevers raised lots of greens for salad in many varieties. But they discovered that Minnesota folks prefer other vegetables, and the Brevers adjusted what they grew.

- Organic attracts customers. The Brevers' land, which was in CRP, met certification guidelines that no chemicals had been used three years prior. The biggest part of organic certification is keeping track of all inputs. Think of it like doing your taxes, Brever says. Ploughshare Farm uses fish emulsion and completely composted chicken manure for fertilizer.

- Input costs are higher per acre. In addition to equipment, other typical expenses are: hoophouses, walk-in cooler and delivery van. Raising produce is more labor intensive than other farm crops. The Brevers hire part-time workers, plus a couple of interns each year. Labor costs add up to about a quarter of expenses.

- Diversify. In addition to CSA customers, the Brevers sell to organic food co-ops in metro areas. Start out setting up a relationship with the produce manager and fill in gaps in their orders. The Brevers also created what they call the Food For Folk Project. Donors pay for shares that are given to families with low incomes. This year, deliveries go to a college with a culinary program, where the food is prepared and distributed at metro soup kitchens. Ploughshare Farm also donates leftover produce to food shelves.

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### Mini Holsteins "In The Works"

Miniature cattle breeder Richard Gradwohl is now developing his 19<sup>th</sup> breed, a line of miniature Holsteins. By crossing smaller members of the breed with miniature Dexter and Angus and selecting for size, he bred a cow named Lulu that fits his requirement of less than 46 in. tall.

"I have bred her twice and had two bull calves," reports Gradwohl. "The first one 'Timmy' is about 42 in. tall, and we have bred him to 12 smaller (45-48-in.) Holstein heifers at a 3,000-head dairy in Utah. It will be interesting to see if he breeds true for size."

Both bull calves have been sold to breeders who agreed to follow Gradwohl's breeding program and help develop the breed. The program is based around the concept of line breeding, i.e., constantly crossing back to the progeny of a single individual, often to very close relatives. In this case, all of Gradwohl's miniature Holsteins will trace back to Lulu. The project began by breeding a small Dexter bull to a small Holstein heifer. The resulting cross bull was then bred to a small Angus/Holstein cross. Lulu was the result of these pairings. She is half Holstein, one fourth Angus, and one fourth Dexter. His sons are also half Holstein.

"Lulu is pregnant again, and I am hoping for a female so I can breed half brother and half sister," says Gradwohl.

One reason Gradwohl has settled on the



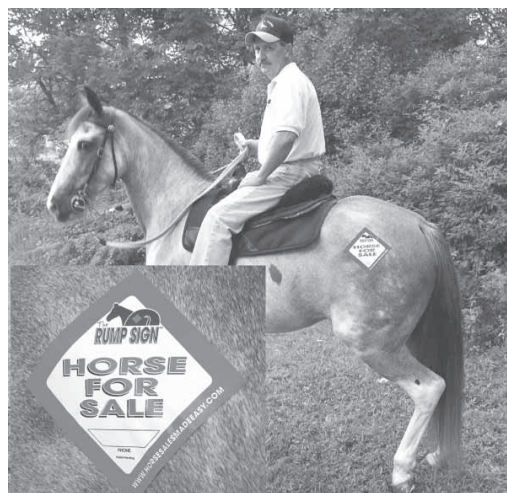
"Patches" is the newest mini Holstein bull calf.

44-46-in. height is that it's high enough to reach underneath and milk. His goal is a cow that takes 1/3 the feed, but produces half the milk of a full-size Holstein. At this point, Gradwohl has no production records for Lulu, having let her bull calves nurse rather than milk her. Lack of milk production records hasn't slowed the demand for her offspring. Gradwohl reports having pre-sold five of the yet unconfirmed calves sired by Timmy. Prices won't be finalized until the calves are born.

"The ones coming from Timmy will be priced from \$4,000 to \$6,000 depending on conformation and height," says Gradwohl. "Anything taller will be closer to \$4,000."

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Got a horse for sale? Let people know about it with this peel and stick "rump sign".



### "Rump Sign" Turns Your Horse Into A Walking Ad

The process of buying and selling horses has been made easier with this new "peel and stick" sign from Horse Sales Made Easy.

The "Rump Sign" is a durable vinyl self-adhesive "for sale" sign that sticks to your horse's hind quarters and turns him into a walking advertisement.

It says "Horse For Sale" in bright, bold lettering on a 6-in. diamond-shaped sign, and includes space for the seller to add a phone number or email address.

"It's an easy way to let people know you've got a horse for sale, and it works wherever your horse is - on the trail, at a show, in the pasture, or tied to your trailer - any place people can see him," says inventor John Rogers, Parkman, Ohio. "At shows and on trail rides, there are often a lot of horses and some of them are probably for sale, but no one knows it. It's not practical to walk around telling everyone you've got a horse for sale.

One customer in Kentucky told us he went to a training course and brought his horse along as a display. He wanted to sell the horse so he stuck the rump sign on it, and within two hours he had sold it."

Rogers says the Rump Sign takes a small amount of hair when it's removed, but no more than is lost during brushing.

A pack of two signs sells for \$4 plus \$1.10 S&H. Or you can buy a kit that includes six rump signs; two "anywhere" stall signs that show the breed, age and gender along with contact information; one classified ad; and an "Easy Guide to Selling Horses" book. The kit sells for \$24.95 plus S&H.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Horse Sales Made Easy, P.O. Box 555, Parkman, Ohio 44080 (ph 440 221-4141; [jjj2711@Alltel.net](mailto:jjj2711@Alltel.net); [www.horsesalesmadeeasy.com](http://www.horsesalesmadeeasy.com)).