

Money-Making Ideas To Boost Farm Income

Ken Smith's custom-built 40-ft. manure spreader is pulled by a 500 hp, 18-speed diesel truck. Three steering axles allow the huge unit to turn on a dime. It can spread up to about 1,000 tons of manure per day.



By Janis Schole, Contributing Editor

Spreader Makes Manure Business Profitable

"Giant" and "technologically advanced" are two terms that describe Ken Smith's humongous manure spreader at High River, Alberta.

The huge, custom-built 40-ft. spreader is pulled by a 500 hp, 18-speed diesel truck. It'll spread 1,000 tons of manure a day, and is the main profit driver for Smith's farm-based business called Corral Cleaners.

Smith's loader tractors are all equipped with scales for recording the actual tonnage being applied to the land. Smith also of-

fers a GPS mapping service, so farmers have concrete data that shows where the manure was applied.

The gargantuan 5th-wheel tri-axle trailer was a custom-built project. The three axles are steering axles, built in Germany and shipped to Texas where the trailer's chassis and frame rails were built.

Since the axles pivot, the trailer doesn't "cut over" when the truck turns a tight corner. Instead, it stays in the truck's tracks, allowing the huge unit to turn on a dime.

"The chassis alone cost \$100,000, and the truck was on top of that, plus the spreader box was another \$75,000," Smith says. "The advantage is that one truck and one operator can carry twice the load as one of our tandem axle truck-mounted spreaders. One engine, one less operator, and less fuel is a major benefit in today's labor market. Each load covers a half mile-long strip of land."

The spreader box was made by W. McKee Manufacturing Ltd. in Red Deer, Alberta, and they did the final assembly of the whole unit.

Smith's complete corral cleaning business includes two tandem truck spreaders, three tri-axle truck-mounted spreaders, two end-dump trucks, 2 big Deere loads with 4-yard buckets, and the massive 40-ft. 5th wheel trailer spreader.

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Bee Biz Keeps Farm Family Buzzing

Bill Koelzer's first two beehives were a hobby. By the time he hit 50 hives, he knew he had become a full time beekeeper. After five years of work, he's now at 360 hives and still expanding. He expects to have between 450 and 600 hives by the end of the season.

"My father and his father kept bees," explains Koelzer. "When my father was considering getting rid of his extraction equipment, I decided it was an opportunity I couldn't pass up. I've always enjoyed the outdoors, and the majority of the work is done outside at the prettiest time of the year."

Koelzer Bee Farm does a lot more than just collect and sell honey. They also provide pollination services in Kansas and California, sell bees to beekeeper wannabees, and make a wide variety of honey and honey-based products including pollen and skin care products.

Their first alternative product was flavored honey. Then they started producing a hand lotion that grew out of a personal need. The skin on Koelzer's hands was breaking down and bleeding. His wife Teri developed the lotion and when it healed his hands, they began selling it.

It's a family affair with Bill's dad still acting as mentor and consultant. Their daughter makes the skin care products and her fiance helps when it is time to move hives.

"I am mechanically inclined, so I started

making my own extraction equipment," says Koelzer. "Everything I know how to do is utilized in the beekeeping business."

Beekeeping can get complicated as the business gets bigger. Mites are a big problem, and deciding what kind of bees to raise is a serious consideration. Italian bees are the most gentle and easiest to handle. The Russian bees Koelzer prefers produce well, have excellent survival skills and are more tolerant of mites. One drawback is that if the honey frames get full, the hive will swarm and a large group will leave the hive.

"You have to always have extra frames ready or be ready to break the hive down to split the colony," says Koelzer.

It is these splits that he sells to beginning beekeepers or uses to expand his own colonies. Koelzer doesn't mind others getting into the business. In fact, he encourages it. He buys and sells used equipment and sells queens and entire colonies of bees to beginners. An added value is his intro lecture on beekeeping.

"People come to our location, and I open the hive and show them what they are getting," says Koelzer. "Depending on the time of the year and how big a hive they want, the price can vary from \$75 to \$250. Handling equipment is extra."

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Koelzer Bee Farm is a family business that makes a wide variety of honey-based products. They market them in a variety of ways.



Their daughter makes the skin care products and her fiance helps when it's time to move hives.

"Comb Tray" Puts Money In Honey

Honeycomb lovers are willing to pay for the treat, but few honey producers want the hassle of cutting honeycomb down to size. Packaging and handling honeycomb is a sticky business, too. A plastic tray from a small company in Canada has changed all that. Called Bee-O-Pac, it is packing money back in the honeycomb business.

"Honeycomb production and sales is labor intensive, and there is no economy of scale," explains Andrew Sperlich. "Everyone said there was no market, but I felt the market had disappeared because the supply dwindled."

Sperlich and his partner Anne Mifsud, who also own Norfolk Aviaries, set out to

introduce economy of scale where the more you produce, the less time and labor involved. They did it by making the bee do the hard work of filling packages with honeycomb.

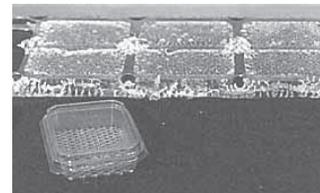
Working with funding from two government grants, Sperlich came up with Bee-O-Pac. The food grade plastic trays consist of eight compartments with a honeycomb pattern embossed on the bottom surface. Beekeepers snap two together before slipping them into the hive for bees to fill with honeycomb. Once removed from the hive, the compartments are cut apart, capped, labeled and ready for sale as separate containers. Each one weighs about 4 to 5 oz.

"Tests carried out by the University of

Guelph show they reduce the labor involved in packaging honeycomb by 75 percent," says Sperlich.

He admits the process takes special handling and timing and describes it as the ultimate in beekeeping management. Comb production is best with young bees with active glands for wax production in early summer. For those who learn to manage it, the payoff is substantial. The suggested retail price for the ready-to-fill packs is about \$8/frame (16 small containers).

"The comb-filled packs retail in Canada for about \$4 each, which makes the beekeeper about \$4/lb. for honey, compared to about 85¢/lb. for honey they sell by the barrel.



Plastic "comb tray" lets the bee do the hard work of filling packages with honeycomb.

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