

He Turns Waste Sheet Rock Into Cash

Jim Kramer makes money on both ends when recycling waste wallboard. On the one end, his suppliers pay him \$15/ton to haul away the raw product. On the other end, his customers pay him \$29/ton for the ground-up product with the paper backing removed. It's used as a gypsum fertilizer and soil amendment and can even reduce odor and bacteria from manure and control flies.

"It has 20 to 22 percent calcium and 14 to 17 percent sulfur," explains Kramer. "The calcium will mellow up the soil and take out salts. And, it's an economical source of sulfur."

The Brooklyn, Wis. farmer is so busy recycling wallboard he has cut back on acres farmed. When he and a partner first started the business 11 years ago, they didn't know if they had a market or could make any money on it.

Kramer eventually bought out his partner and continued slowly building business. It was easy to get suppliers interested, even though he would only accept brand new scrap that was free of nails, screws and other junk. Construction companies and carpenters were happy to dump the scrap at Kramer's farm for his \$15/ton rate versus \$36/ton at the landfill. Processing the sheet rock inexpensively and finding customers was the big challenge.

"We didn't want to stick a lot of money into it, so we designed all the equipment

ourselves," he says. "All the equipment is based on farm equipment."

The equipment consists of an industrial loader, a Knight "Slinger" side unloading manure spreader, a roller/crusher, a screener, and conveyors. A tractor pto powers the Knight spreader, and an old combine engine provides hydraulic power for hydraulic motors on the roller, screener and various conveyors.

Wallboard scrap is stored in a hoop building before being dumped into the spreader. Cast iron hammers break up the wallboard, knocking much of it off the paper. It also "slings" it against a hood that directs it into a conveyor which carries the pieces to the crusher.

The crusher consists of two steel drums about 8 to 10 in. in diameter and 2 1/2 ft. long with beads welded on them for a rough surface. A slight speed variance between the two helps grind wallboard chunks into powder and pieces fine enough to fall through a 1/4-in. screen.

"The screener is a 6-ft. dia., 12-ft. long drum," explains Kramer. "The powder and small chunks fall through onto a rubber belt and then to a conveyor and a hoop building for storage, while the paper goes out the end."

The screener is important to quality control for customer satisfaction with ease of application and consistency. "We recommend that customers use a crop consultant and do soil testing so you don't over spread," he says.



Jim Kramer makes money by recycling waste wallboard. The ground-up product is used as a gypsum fertilizer and to reduce manure odor, among other things.

Based on research conducted at the University of Wisconsin, Kramer applied for and received a patent on the use of gypsum for odor control.

"The gypsum ties up the ammonia, eliminates the odor and adds value to the manure," says Kramer. "It turns it into ammonia sulfate, which is slow-release nitrogen."

Unlike other manure amendments for odor control, the gypsum stays in suspension in slurry tanks and in pits.

The research, market preparation and quality control are working. Recent newspaper coverage has spread the word with an increasing amount of product going to livestock

farmers for odor control. For the first time Kramer has had to search for new suppliers of scrap as demand is eating up supply. His low cost processing helps too.

"I had a call from a farmer who was getting gypsum delivered, and my price was about a third less than he was paying," says Kramer, who also encourages other people to enter the business in other parts of the country. "If anybody wants to get in the business, they are welcome to call."

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B&B "Teaches" Farming To Visitors

Ward and Barb Halligan teach small-scale farming to guests at their comfortable Virginia CornerStone Farm bed and breakfast. Sessions last for anywhere from two days to a week and they charge \$175 per person per night.

Like many of their visitors, Ward and Barb left the corporate world for life in the country. The Halligans have chickens, geese, ducks, cows, horses, donkeys and sheep. Many are miniature breeds.

They used the experience and knowledge they've gained in 10 years of raising animals to create a detailed handbook on caring for livestock. "Classes" are held around the kitchen table and in the barns, with hands-on lessons on nutrition, veterinary care, housing and livestock selection.

"There's a big difference from buying a bunch of books as opposed to coming out and doing," explains Barb, who used training skills she learned at AT&T to develop lessons for aspiring farmers, based on their answers to a pre-arrival questionnaire.

The Halligans require that students stay at least three nights so they can spend two full days at their CornerStone Farm. Some already have knowledge of hobby farming, such as one California client who has taken three sessions during different seasons to learn about raising goats.

"She came when our goats were kidding, and we had our baby monitoring system on," Barb says. "We know when the doe lets out a certain pitch scream that she is ready to deliver."

Their California guest appreciated the baby monitor tip, Barb says, adding that their guest bought the kid she delivered.

Other guests know very little about hobby farming. About 25 percent give up the idea of farming after spending time at the Halligans.

"We see that as a good thing," Barb says,



Visitors pay for the education they get at CornerStone Farm.

since they didn't get into something they weren't prepared for.

Barb notes that the short-term mentorships can't teach everything. She and her husband focus on animal husbandry and touch on shelter, fencing and farm equipment. The Halligans give their guests a book on small-scale livestock farming, and they stay connected later, answering questions through phone calls and emails.

"We love doing it," Barb says. "It's a growing need. A lot of couples want to get back to the basics on a small farm. They're tired of the rat race and want a safer environment for their children and a wholesome environment for themselves."

The \$175 fee includes lodging, meals and the mentorship sessions. They also offer farm experience vacation packages for couples and families who just want to relax.

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How To "Cash Crop" Your Wildlife

You can cash in on the wildlife you feed throughout the year by selling hunting leases. It doesn't mean you, your family and your friends can't hunt the land; it just means you get paid for letting others hunt it too. You can do it yourself or sign up with a lease management firm like the Hunting Lease Network.

"We have close to 40,000 sportsmen regularly bidding on our network, looking for places to hunt and fish," says Mark Lyon, a network representative for Indiana, Illinois and Kentucky. "We have seasonal leases, such as for deer hunting, but 90 percent are for 12-month leases and all species. The landowner can set it up the way he wants and be as involved as he wants."

One of the advantages of going with an outfit like the Hunting Lease Network are the "extras" they offer, like liability insurance. Although most states have a liability exception for landowners who allow the public on their property, once you charge for access, it's another story.

"We write a policy that is the best you can get in the industry," says Lyon. "The lessee and landowner are insured. If a hunter gets sued, he can't sue the landowner, and likewise the landowner can't sue a hunter/lessee."

Lyon warns against simply adding liability coverage to a farm policy. He warns that most insurance policies have fine print that can get you in trouble.

"I've seen some policies with exclusions for hunting from stands, use of motorized vehicles and other things common to hunting today," he says. "We've had some major clients that have turned our policy over to their legal teams, and it is seamless."

The disadvantage to the network is they charge an upfront fee of \$100 to enroll in the system and take a 25 percent fee from each year's payment. The enrollment fee covers

placement on their website and review of the legal description or a visit to the land by the franchise holder for the state. It also covers all legal documents, including the insurance. Franchise holders like Lyon work with the landowner to establish reasonable rates for the property. These vary by property and state. High-end properties are often managed for wildlife, have hardwood ridges, a creek or river and are next to public land.

"If it is close to a park, wildlife refuge or waterfowl resting area, the price will be higher," says Lyon. "In Illinois, lease rates run from \$8 per acre to a high of \$30. The low range is for land without much timber, though a good fencerow can still hide a lot of wildlife."

Terms of the lease affect price too. Lyon notes that if hunters have exclusive access year round, it is icing on the cake.

Landowners, especially those with a business background, can also profit another way from hunting leases. Lyon says his firm, a division of Farmers National, a farm management company, is looking for additional franchise holders to represent the company. "The company is expanding rapidly and looking at adding three to four states after the first of the year," he says. "There are 7 representatives covering 17 states at this time."

Lyon says the connection with Farmers National provides the expertise in lease writing and appraisal. In addition, should the landowner decide to sell his property, most franchisees are also licensed real estate brokers and will help sell the land.

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