



Todd Benjamin delivers corn to customers just like companies that deliver oil and propane.

Grower Delivers To Corn Burning Customers

Todd Benjamin direct markets corn to customers who heat their homes with corn burners. He delivers - just like companies deliver oil and propane - and he's willing to help other farmers duplicate his business.

The Webberville, Mich., farmer and his family came up with the idea when Benjamin's parents switched from a wood stove to corn.

"They loved the corn stove, but handling 50-lb. bags wasn't appealing to my dad," Benjamin says. "We got playing around on how we could do it better."

The project became a family affair with Benjamin's wife, Loretta, a high school agriculture teacher and FFA adviser, and their daughter, Cassie, an FFA member. They designed a polyethylene bin to hold just over a ton of dried, shelled corn that fits on a pallet, is short enough to slip into a garage and empties into a 5-gal. bucket at a comfortable height. The design and specifications Cassie created with computer software were used to begin the patent process as well as provide the blueprint for a mold for an Illinois manufacturer.

Benjamin, who grows 300 acres of corn, experimented with drying and cleaning his own corn. He dries it down to about 12 percent moisture.

"Corn is stable at 15 percent, but it doesn't burn as hot," Benjamin says. "You're wasting energy burning off moisture."

To remove debris, which can plug and extinguish corn burners, Benjamin runs the corn over a double screen rotary cleaner as it goes into the grain dryer and again when it's conveyed into the delivery truck. The former dairyman also uses a high capacity funnel fan to blow chaff off the corn as it comes out of the dryer.

Benjamin put together a delivery truck with an enclosed van body and a used saltbox he purchased from the county highway department. He suspended the box on weigh bars, so he knows exactly how many pounds of corn he delivers to customers' bins using a seed vacuum and 40-ft. stainless steel flex hose. A printer in his truck allows him to print out a professional receipt with the date and amount of corn he delivers.

In 2006, Benjamin started with six customers and ended the heating season with 85. In 2007, he was maxed out with more than 150 customers. Placing his bins at corn stove dealers netted most of his customers.



Benjamin's poly bins hold just over a ton of dried, shelled corn.

"It's critical to keep the delivery radius to 25 miles maximum," Benjamin says. "After that it's not cost effective, and it just takes too much time."

At the beginning of the 2007 heating season, he set the price at \$4.48/bushel (or \$160/ton delivered) though he knew corn prices could rise. Customers appreciate knowing that the price will remain the same all winter, Benjamin says. "We're delivering corn for about the same as what it costs them to pick it up," he adds, and his customers - many who live in the suburbs - appreciate the convenience. "Once people have had good corn delivered to their house, they won't go back to picking it up."

Benjamin's customers use an average of one ton of corn/month, and they call him when they need more.

Benjamin sells the bins for \$859 and customers have the option to lease them for 1 cent/lb. of corn the first year. After testing the service for a year, they can apply the amount they paid to purchasing the bin. About 130 customers have Benjamin's bins.

"I get calls from all over the Midwest from people who think it's a good idea, but there's no farmer in their area willing to do it," he says. Benjamin is willing to work with farmers interested in setting up a business similar to his, by selling them bins at a wholesale rate (minimum of five bins) and offering advice.

Despite rising corn prices, Benjamin believes corn stoves will continue to be popular. The cost of corn will still be less than other fuels, he says, and many customers prefer to support a local person rather than a foreign fuel company.

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"Boy Breeder" Succeeds In Exotic Bird Business

Age is no barrier to success for 15-year-old Ty Marshall who operates a thriving poultry and waterfowl business called "Ty's Exotics."

It all started with a gift from his aunt of a laying hen when Marshall was only four years old. His love for birds at this early age led him to steadily expand his collection.

There appears to be no end in sight even now, as he continues to add more varieties by re-investing his profits into his year-round operation.

The young Alberta entrepreneur currently breeds 50 species of waterfowl, and 50 species of game birds and poultry on his parents' grain and oilseed farm. He's the youngest member of the Prairie Ornamental Pheasant and Waterfowl Association, and already has 10 years of breeding experience under his belt.

"I've focused a lot on waterfowl because they're usually harder, easier to manage, and there's a good market for them, but there's also strong demand for game birds and poultry," Marshall says.

He sells everything from fertilized eggs to breeding pairs and interacts with customers across Canada. Marshall hatched out 300 eggs last year and sold about 150 day-old chicks and ducklings. The rest, he sells as adults at exotic bird and livestock sales, as well as privately. In fact, Marshall participates in as many as 10 of these events per year, where he keeps a close watch on market trends.

"Prices for various species change from season to season, so I try not to sell until the market has strengthened," he points out.

Some birds are more profitable to raise than others, but prices are often proportionate to how difficult the species is to produce. Some of the poultry may sell for \$20/bird, peacocks can range from \$50 to \$200 each, ornamental ducks and geese bring anywhere from \$20 to \$1,500/pair and breeding pairs of trumpeter swans



Ty Marshall breeds 50 species of waterfowl and 50 species of game birds on his parents' grain and oilseed farm in Alberta.



Ornamental ducks and geese sell for up to \$1,500 per pair.

generally sell for \$500 to \$1,000.

He ships in new breeding stock by air-line, from other producers across Canada, and says his inventory is continually changing.

The Marshalls have a nice, half-acre pond with flowing water on their farm, and the family built a network of fenced outdoor runs, along with hatching and rearing barns.

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Greg Lattig is a scrap metal dealer who splits whatever the steel is worth with the owner, minus his expenses.

Scrap Steel Business Shares Payoff

By C. F. Marley, Contributing Editor

After a tornado passed over my farm and knocked down a couple buildings, I decided to get rid of a lot of old machinery that had been stored in those buildings.

Most scrap iron dealers are not reputable. They'll take your steel but they won't pay you for it. So I shopped around and found a local scrap metal dealer who operates in a different way.

Greg Lattig, Tower Hill, Ill., has been a scrap metal dealer for 10 years. He splits

whatever the steel is worth with the owner, minus his expenses. He showed up with a long trailer with a beaver tail loading ramp for loading his tractor. He loaded up the trailer and paid me a couple hundred dollars.

The lesson I learned: Shop around when looking for a scrap dealer.

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