

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 3 pages.

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.**

## He Turned Cotton Into A Hot Decorating Accessory

Television personality Martha Stewart inspired Fahey "Butch" Byrum III, to look at his cotton crop in a different way back in 1996.

"I saw her make a cotton boll wreath and thought 'I have a whole field of those,'" the fourth-generation Edenton, N.C., cotton farmer recalls. "So I bought a computer and a camera and taught myself how to build a website."

Instead of sending all of his 650 acres of cotton to market, he now hand cuts the best cotton bolls to sell individually (\$4.75 shipping included) or as plants (\$34 for 2 to 6 plants). Plus he sells raw cotton with seed starting at \$15.50/lb. Recently, he purchased a business that makes little cotton bales to add to his inventory of website items for sale.

"A cotton boll is like a dried flower picked right from the plant," Byrum says. Bolls are 2 to 4 in. in diameter and very soft, though the burr at the bottom is sharp. He sells cotton with and without the burr. Customers purchase bolls for wedding bouquets, centerpieces, casket palls, and store displays including large chains such as Land's End and Brooks Brothers. He also offers lines of completed wedding floral designs and cotton apparel on his website.

Some customers prefer other items. Macy's in New York ordered a 500-lb. bale for a display. Byrum offers the full-size bales on his website as well as more affordable footstool sizes starting at \$60, including shipping. They are tightly baled with 7 tons of pressure.

He offers small bales with steel strapping in 2 1/2, 4 1/2, 6 1/2, 18 and 24-in. sizes starting at \$8.50. People use them for all kinds of decorating.

He has customers for his products from all over the U.S. and around the world. "All my dried cotton products will keep



Cotton grower Fahey Byrum sells part of his crop as decorating accessories including these little cotton bales.



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for years," Byrum says. "The only thing that happens over time would be a slight discoloration (yellowing) of the cotton itself."

Another market niche is his educational cotton – handpicked but not as pretty as his bolls. Teachers use it to teach students how cotton grows.

Byrum tries to harvest and store enough cotton bolls and seed to have product available until the next harvest in late August. Interest has grown tremendously, Byrum says, and he's very busy keeping up with what was once just a sideline.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, H. Fahey Byrum III (Butch), 409 Evans Bass Rd., Edenton, N.C. 27932 (ph 252 562-4300; www.cottonman.com).



Dairy farmer Stan Armstrong and his family have figured out how to grow more than 100 varieties of cactus in their on-farm greenhouse.

## Dairy Farmer Launches Profitable Cactus Sideline

Dairy farmer Stan Armstrong has never been one to shy away from a challenge. So it's not surprising that he and his family have figured out how to grow more than 100 varieties of cactus in their on-farm greenhouse.

The sideline business got started 5 years ago when his daughter gave him a gift of saguaro cactus seeds. Now, cactus growing is a pleasant diversion from the dairy business. He sells to a local chain of retail nurseries.

"The coloring of the plants when they bloom is amazing," Armstrong says. "When you stand among the plants that you grew and nurtured, it's really peaceful. It's really pleasant in the greenhouse with the smells coming off the flowering plants."

The business is named Rita Lee's Nursery after Armstrong's wife who helps along with the couple's adult children. Together they have learned how to water, fertilize and nurture the different cactus varieties, which all have different needs.

"We use 5 or 6 different fertilizer mixes," Armstrong says. "In the winter we basically maintain a 45 to 50-degree temperature."

At the same time, varieties need different

environments. Christmas cactus plants need shade, moisture and coolness, for example, while desert cactus plants prefer it dry and hot.

The biggest challenge in Oregon is humidity. Armstrong has learned to treat black mildew with hydrogen peroxide and other common household products.

The Armstrongs continue to seek out new varieties and start their own plants with seeds and cuttings. Last year they added 50 new varieties.

"Orchid cactus (Epiphyllum) are the most enjoyable to look at and watch grow," Armstrong says. It has big, fragrant, 5-in. orchid-like blooms in various colors that trail from the plant on stems up to 6 ft. long.

As he gets close to retiring from the dairy business, Armstrong plans to grow his cactus operation. He plans to add two more greenhouses – and grow even more varieties.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Rita Lee's Nursery, 6963 Keene Rd. N.E., Gervais, Ore. 97026 (ph 503 741-6571; ritaleesnursery@gmail.com).

## Farm-Sized Pasteurizer Doubles As A Mixer, Cooler

The Vat Pasteurizer from Northwestern Tools is a big hit with small cheese and ice cream makers. Its double wall construction makes it ideal for gently heating milk as the jacket water is heated. Later it's cooled as cold tap water is flushed through the jacket. Still later, the heater in the bottom of the jacket can be used to stabilize milk at desired temperatures. A variable speed mixer motor agitates milk and mixes in added ingredients.

"The immersion heater brings the water to pasteurizing temperature while a separate heater and fan heat the air above the fluid 5 degrees warmer," says Bob Madewell, Northwestern Tools, Inc. "If you set it at 145°, it takes the milk there and holds it, no tweaking or adjusting needed. It doesn't fluctuate more than a tenth of a degree."

Madewell adds that The Vat is the only one of its size that is 3-A approved to sell in all 50 states. The 3-A rating requires

industry and regulator approved handling and cleanability standards be built into the equipment.

The Vat was developed nearly 15 years ago by John Thomczek, a New Hampshire metal craftsman and engineer. He built and sold a few each year based on word of mouth referrals. Now it's being manufactured and sold to a much-expanded market.

"John built the first one for a group of nuns who needed a regulator-approved small batch pasteurizer for cheese making," says Madewell. "When John died, his brother, who owns Northwestern Tools, bought the rights to The Vat. We updated it to the latest 3-A standards and began promoting it. Last year we sold out the production run and are expanding production this year."

Madewell says cheesemakers like being able to pasteurize, cool and stabilize at a desired temperature in the same unit. "They can cool it to 90° and add the cheese

cultures through the hatch in the top without transferring."

Ice cream makers are also finding The Vat ideal for small batches. "It works great for those starting from scratch who have to pasteurize all their ingredients," says Madewell. "Even those using an already pasteurized commercial mix have to pasteurize again if they add eggs or fresh ingredients such as fruit. Plus flushing tap water through the jacket is a low cost way to cool the mix before transferring it to the ice cream freezer."

Madewell says the company currently makes a 7 to 15-gal. unit (\$15,399) and a 17 to 30-gal. unit (\$21,699). They are planning to add a 60-gal. unit this fall.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Northwestern Tools, Inc., 3130 Valleywood Dr., Dayton, Ohio 45429 (ph 800 236-3956; bmadewell@northwesterntools.com; www.thevatpasteurizer.com).



Vat Pasteurizer can be used as both a mixer and cooler, making it popular with cheese and ice cream makers.