

## Turkey Farm Grew Into Regional Market

When Dick and Jane Peterson's son, John, and daughter-in-law, Erica, came back to the farm they started looking for ways to grow their operation. Expanding the turkey farm was not an option. So they decided to direct-sell the turkeys they were already producing.

Ferndale Market grew out of the new business plan. It would serve as a retail outlet while they built a wholesale business. Today they provide high quality turkey to more than 70 restaurants, schools, colleges and other retailers across a five state area.

"We raise about 200,000 turkeys each year, starting in the early spring with the birds inside buildings, but with outdoor yards they can use when they want," explains John. "In the summer they're completely free range with outdoor shelters on fresh grass. We rotate pastures weekly. In the fall they are back in the buildings with the outdoor yards once again available."

Their turkeys are raised naturally without added hormones or antibiotics in the feed. Later they're processed at a USDA

approved facility, again without any artificial additives being used.

"We sell whole turkeys, breasts, ground turkey, and sausage, a total of about 15 retail products in all," says John.

The Petersons also reached out to other small producers within 100 miles. "Over the course of the year, we obtain products from more than 70 different producers, from seasonal fresh raspberries to beef, pork and lamb year round."

John says the business has worked out well for everyone involved.

"You need both the retail and wholesale components," he says. "You also need a market with consumers interested in knowing where their food comes from and where the animals are raised. Finally, you need other suppliers around you to build relationships with and partner."

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During summer, turkeys are raised free range with outdoor shelters on fresh grass. Ferndale Market sells about 15 retail products, including whole turkeys, breasts, ground turkey, and sausage.



## Farm Wife Starts "Dog Hotel"

Tails are wagging at a new pet boarding facility on the Iowa century farm of Michelle and Allen Erickson. "It's been a dream for me and I feel very fortunate to have made it happen," says Michelle, who opened 4-Paws Inn last September after 5 years of planning.

"Pets are family" is the slogan of Michelle's business, and it shows in every aspect of the facility. The 7,000 sq. ft. building has 12 luxury suites, 16 bungalows and covered patio play areas. Amenities include tile floors with in-floor heating, sliding glass doors and individual beds or cots for the dogs. Some suites even have flat screen televisions so the animals feel right at home with their favorite program. Boarding rates are \$20/night and include air conditioning in the summer and an outdoor patio.

"Meeting the right people at the right time is what made the 4-Paws business possible," Michelle says. "I did extensive research outside of Iowa and spoke with other retreat owners, and then hired an architect from Houston, Texas, to design the facility."

Her husband Allen is supportive of the venture, though he's busy operating their corn and soybean farm. Michelle is available for the animals 7 days a week and usually starts her daily routine before 8 a.m. to accommodate feeding, exercise and cleaning. The Inn boards dogs and cats that stay overnight or up to 30 days.

"I want people to feel comfortable when they leave their pets here and know they'll be safe and happy and well cared for," says Michelle. "The Inn has a security system, an indoor training room and a state of the art grooming room. Guests can personally drop their pets off in the private suites, which Michelle says helps them quickly get accustomed to their temporary surroundings."

4-Paws Inn employs a groomer and caregiver and another part time groomer. The dogs get plenty of exercise with an on-site training facility and a spacious outdoor area. "It's important for us to accommodate all types of dogs," says Michelle. She has boarded police dogs in training and many



Michelle Erickson with a "groomed" puppy patron at her pet boarding facility.



The 7,000 sq. ft. building has heated ceramic tile floors, sliding glass doors, and individual beds for the dogs.

older dogs, which seem to love the heated tile floors.

Although 4-Paws Inn just started in late 2011, Michelle has been pleased with business so far and is confident that it'll grow and prosper in the years ahead. "Being able to enjoy work is important," she says. "My grandfather always said 'do what you love and the rest will fall in place'. Animals are my passion, so that's why I'm doing this."

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Russell Smelser checks the alignment of the fan and motor on an old windmill. He and his nephew Lee repair and restore old windmills to "like new" condition.



Photo courtesy, Richard Gwin

## He Repairs, Restores Old Windmills

"I find old windmill parts buried in junk piles, abandoned barns and landfills," says Russell Smelser of McLouth, Kan. "I try to salvage vanes and fan blades, straightening them for use on windmill repair jobs." Smelser and his nephew Lee have a business repairing and restoring old windmills to "like new" condition.

Smelser started his part time repair business in 1985. His first restoration was a big wooden windmill that his grandmother used to pump water for her flowers. It still stands in the yard where he lives.

"When I started there were probably close to 100 windmills in this part of Kansas, but now it's down to about 30 or 40," Smelser says. "I've worked on most of them, and even moved one of them three times when it was bought and sold."

According to Smelser, Kansas, like many other states, once had thousands of windmills. Railroads built the first ones out of wood to supply water for steam locomotives and for work crews as they laid tracks. A shallow well, a wooden windmill frame and a wooden storage tank were erected every three miles. Metal windmills were introduced about 1875 and within a few years about 300 manufacturers were producing them across the country. About 6,000,000 were sold between 1870 and 1935. Every farm or ranch had one to pump water for their family and livestock.

"Names like Star Zephyr, Monitor, Aermotor, Dempster and The Wonder Mill can still be seen on working windmills today," Smelser says. He works mostly on Aermotor, Dempster and Baker Monitor windmills because he can still find replacement parts

for them.

Renovation of old windmills requires a lot of patience, notes Smelser. "It takes time to locate the parts and most of the time they aren't interchangeable from one make to another. Companies would use different size shafts or make special bearings for their windmills so customers would come back to them for replacement parts."

Smelser keeps a large supply of windmill parts at his farm, calling it "a graveyard for old windmills". He has blades and vanes on the side of one shed. Motors, gears, legs, ladders and just about everything else can be found in buildings or in piles outside of them. For most repair jobs he likes to use original metal tails and fan blades rather than new pieces. "The original metal fins are heavier than new ones, and if we mix them on a wheel it's out of balance," he says.

The brand of an old windmill is identified by looking at the motor, the castings used to hold the braces or how the ladder is made. Aermotor has a three-legged tower and runs their ladder up one leg with loop steps. Most manufacturers have four legs with the ladder in the center of one side.

Smelser sold two new windmills recently, but he specializes in repairs and renovations. He has a truck-mounted crane that lifts him up to the motor to change oil, a common service request. The crane can also lower or lift a complete windmill frame.

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