

Company Offers Complete Farm Equipment Setup

After more than 25 years of setting up, operating, and maintaining large equipment on his own farm, Dave Houtwed saw a need for a company that could offer a setup service and keep up on the latest technology for farmers.

So, 5 years ago he and his friend, Alan Crotts, started up Precision Ag Solutions, a Cunningham, Kan., company that designs and installs fertilizer systems and rebuilds air seeders. They offer complete farm equipment setup and reconditioning and will come out to your farm, provided it's less than 200 miles away from their home base.

"Farm equipment keeps getting bigger and more technical, so it's getting harder for the average farmer to figure out how to make all this precision technology work," says Houtwed. "Our goal is to help farmers make decisions and set things up. We work in cooperation with both dealers and farmers to set up any model of new equipment."

The company offers complete planter setup, from assembling the planter to all the latest in precision planting: liquid

fertilizer, herbicides, row shutoff, mounting saddle tanks, and plumbing saddle tanks. They also do complete strip-tiller setup and will assemble machines from factory crates, mount liquid tanks, install Raven controllers, plumb liquid and NH3 with sectional controllers.

The company also reconditions planters, drills, disks, row crop heads, etc. at your location.

Four different work crews are employed. Two crews set up fertilizer systems, one rebuilds air seeders, and one handles equipment.

"Most of the work we do is on new machines," says Houtwed. "For example, the dealer sells the farmer a new planter and then we ask the farmer what kind of fertilizer equipment he wants. We're willing to customize according to the customer's needs and rig up plumbing to tie all this stuff together."

"A lot of our work is on new Deere equipment because Deere offers a lot of advanced GPS and electronic equipment so we plug into that stuff. If necessary we'll design and build our own mounting



"Our goal is to help farmers make decisions and keep up on the latest technology," says Dave Houtwed, who operates a company that offers complete farm equipment setup.

brackets," says Houtwed.

Reconditioning planters and drills to like-new condition can really pay off, says Houtwed. "We can replace all the worn parts, including disks, scrapers, bearings, and chains, for about 20 percent of the cost

of trading for a new planter."

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Meet Ipp: The Perfect Pasture Pig Breed

It's all about the snout, says Shelly Farris, who admits to being a snout snob when it comes to pigs. After several years of research and breeding, she and her husband, Gary, believe they have developed the perfect pig to raise on pasture. Their Idaho Pasture Pig (Ipp) has a short, upturned snout that reduces rooting, compared to breeds that use their long snouts like shovels to rip up pastureland. Plus, the Farris says, Ipps are so docile and gentle that piglets will crawl into their laps - and the sow has no problem with it.

"It all started with one little Kunekune pig named Domino, who changed our lives forever," Farris says. "He was loveable and followed us around like a faithful dog. Gary would go out and sit with him for hours."

Kunekune is a small pasture pig breed from New Zealand. Gary was content to have pigs as pets. Shelly, however, wanted to raise pigs for food on their Rigby, Idaho, farm. The Farris liked the good meat qualities and growth rates in the Duroc and Berkshire breeds, but liked the Kunekune's snout and good nature. In 2006, the Farris

began the process of developing a new breed, which requires a minimum of three pure breeds, seven generations, and lots of documentation.

They started selling Ipp breeding stock and bred sows this year.

"The pig we had envisioned in our mind became a reality," Farris says. "Our Ipps graze grass like they are starved for it. They are gentle and smaller in size at maturity (350 to 400 lbs). We could not be happier with their conformation. They have erect ears; most have wattles. They have compact bodies and a nice layer of fat that makes the meat excellent. They reach market weight in 5 1/2 to 7 months (240 to 250 lbs.), depending on the feeding program. They have nice legs and well-rounded hams. They are spotted in color with some black and white and some red and black. We have several lines available and continue to create new lines."

Customers have included mostly hobby farmers who have pasture and want to raise their own meat. Ideal pasture includes mixes with clover, rye, alfalfa, rapeseed, legumes, timothy and bluegrass. The Farris



The Idaho Pasture Pig (IPP) has a short, upturned snout that reduces rooting in pastures.

supplement their herd's diet with a mix of wheat, soybean meal, sow concentrate and ground alfalfa. Pumpkin seeds are a natural dewormer, and pigs love apples, plums and other fruit. Ipps love whey and table scraps too, but Farris never feeds them meat or celery. She notes that whatever is fed to them, especially in the last month, imparts flavor to the meat.

Ipps sows average nine piglets/litter, and boars should be changed every 2 or 3 years. Like other hog breeds, they adapt to hot and cold climates, but need shelter during cold weather and shade in the heat.

The Farris use buildings that were on

their farm and also have huts for shelters. During farrowing, they have small boxes for the piglets to get into, but there have been few problems with sows rolling over on their young.

Breeding stock starts at \$350, and they can be shipped (by air), Farris says. Ipps are already happily grazing in various parts of the U.S.

"Nothing is prettier than a bunch of pigs on pasture," Farris says.

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Hog Island Sheep Come In From The Wild

Wild sheep found on Hog Island off the Virginia coast are now available from a handful of breeders. The unusual breed was left to run wild on the island for nearly 40 years. Since removal from the island in 1970, most have been kept at living history farms. In recent years, a few individuals, like Jeff and Ginny Adams, have begun rebuilding herd numbers.

"There are only about 200 breeding females, and we have about 60 head," says Jeff Adams. "We first saw them at a country fair at Montpelier, the home of James Madison. We decided to get a pair, and it went from there."

The sheep Adams bought are genetically unique. Virginia Tech researchers have found they don't share genetic markers with modern commercial or heritage breeds. They do appear to be distantly related to Scottish Blackface sheep.

They aren't even much like each other. The breed includes polled, horned and scurred types. Faces and legs can be black or speckled in shades from dark brown to gray. Fleeces vary in texture and color, and horns vary from wide open and circular to winged. After decades of unselected breeding, they are a mishmash of traits. Adams is doing his best to keep it that way.

"We try to replicate the island and run the rams and ewes together year-round," he says. "It makes pedigrees impossible, but once you start to select for traits and control breeding, it's human selection, not natural selection."

Adams explains that by running the sheep together, the breed makes the decisions. Like most sheep breeds, breeding starts in September and continues through the end of the year.

The breed grows slowly. While a ram will reach 150 lbs., it usually takes two years.

Lambs are butchered around Thanksgiving at about 60 lbs.

"It takes until deep winter of the first year for lambs to reach 80 lbs.," says Adams. "If ewe lambs are born late in the season, they don't breed until the second year."

While Adams does process and sell lambs from the flock, he's also interested in expanding the breed with serious breeders. For that reason, he has a flat price on all live animals. "I charge \$250 across the board, whether for an 8-week lamb or a 4-year-old ram," he says. "I don't sell many, but I do end up trading quite a few with other rare breed breeders."

Adams and his wife also own American Milking Devon cattle, Tamworth pigs and other rare breeds. They market beef, pork, lamb, poultry and wool, as well as other products from their farm and offer farm tours.

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Photo courtesy Ginny Adams

Wild sheep found on Hog Island off the Virginia coast are now available from a handful of breeders.

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