



On-Farm Pellet Business Turns Weeds Into Cash

You can turn weedy hayfields into cash with pellet-making equipment. Rob and May Miller, son Mike and his wife Marylou are doing just that in upstate N.Y. The former dairy farmers are direct marketing pellets of weeds, grass and hay for fuel, mulch and soil additives, as well as for cat litter and pet bedding. When not pelleting waste forage, they also pelletize barley straw to clean up farm ponds, wood for fuel and kiln-dried pine for horse bedding.

"We started out making our Enviro Energy pellets from poor quality hay and weeds for use in pellet stoves," says Mike Miller. "We've expanded markets for the pellets as we find new products to market."

Raw material comes from area fields that are no longer actively farmed, or hay spoiled by rain. Old hay and crop fields grow up with weeds and grass. Left too long, they fill in with brush and trees.

Btu-wise, the pellets are similar to wood pellets, with 17 lbs. of pellets equal to about a gallon of fuel oil. However, some older pellet stoves can't handle the higher ash content. Newer stoves are better designed to handle the ash. As a result it has taken longer than expected to build a market for the grass fuel pellets.

Meanwhile, the Millers developed a secondary market for the grass pellets as mulch and soil additives. A single layer of pellets on the ground expands 5 to 6 times as they absorb water, producing several inches of weed-stopping mulch. The pelleting process destroys any seeds, so the mulch itself is weed seed-free.

The following season, the mulch can be dug into the soil where it loosens up hard clay and retains water in sandy soils. The pellets also add nutrients.

The pellets, which sell for \$4.50 per 40-lb. bag, can also be added directly to soil in gardens, in the field or even in pots for houseplants. "They practically explode in the ground as they absorb moisture," says Miller.

The Millers have developed a special low heat pelleting process to make soft grass pellets for the cat litter and pet bedding market. They also make pellet barley straw. Using

Need A Control Cable? Tewco Can Make It

Need a control cable replaced? Just call Chad Salter, Tewco, Inc. He has no doubt he can assemble about anything you might need. The Cablecraft linkage distributor and factory authorized cable assembler has a \$300,000 parts inventory to back it up. Tewco custom builds push-pull, spool valve, brake, clutch, throttle, modulator, shifter and even Unidrum lever cable assemblies. Even better, he can have any cable to you in 24 hours or less.

"If you're close enough to bring the old cable in, we'll make it while you wait," promises Salter. "If not, we'll make it and send it out the same day we get it in."

The company can custom make cables for obsolete controls, as well as for prototypes or even production orders. As a third generation cable man, if Salter hasn't seen a job before, his father or grandfather probably did.

Cables made to release cattle head gates have to have a special coating to protect them from corrosion. The coating increases longevity of the cables by a factor of four.

"We have farmers who find out about us and order 10 cables for themselves and their neighbors," says Salter. "Of course we sell single cables by themselves as well."

Pricing on custom cable work is based on component parts needed. There is no standard pricing sheet. Once a cable is received, the customer is called with an estimate before work begins. That includes special coatings to deal with corrosion.

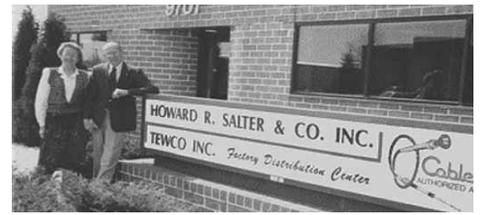
"Just tell us what you are dealing with, and we'll tell you what we have to help," says Salter.

Tewco has the capability to custom assemble based on length and special characteristics or needs. The company has built parachute release cables and throttle cables for top-fuel drag cars and cables for Ferris Wheels.

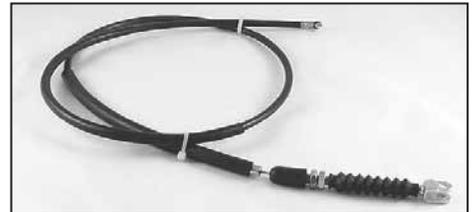
barley straw to control algae growth in ponds is a well-established practice. Barley straw pellets are easier to handle and more effective than straw.

The Millers use an electric-powered, 2 ton per hour Sprout Waldren pelletizer. Different materials require different pelleting dies, which the Millers have custom made. Changing products requires little more than switching a die.

"Currently I am consulting with the University of Maine and a guy from Vermont who wants to pelletize switchgrass and Reed canarygrass," says Miller. "I'm available to



Tewco, Inc., can supply just about any kind of control cable you might need.



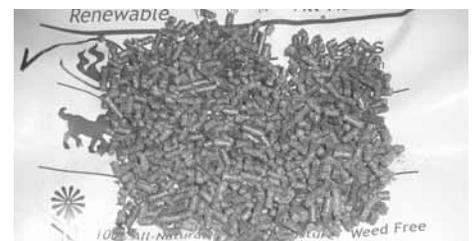
Tewco's most popular products include control cables of all kinds (top), linkages (above left) and the Fumoto engine oil drain valve.

"The Ferris Wheel cables stretched from the assembly plant through the warehouse," recalls Salter.

The company also maintains an inventory of other types of linkages - ball joints, clevis joints and other parts. In addition, they're distributors of the Fumoto engine oil drain valve, a shut-off valve that makes it safer and easier to handle engine oil. Models are available to virtually any vehicle from semi trucks to pickups and cars.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Tewco, Inc., 9701 S. 58th St., Franklin, Wis. 53132 (ph 414 423-8080 or 800 558-8730; tewco@tewco.com; www.tewco.com).

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work with others who want to set up a business like ours."

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Enviro Energy, LLC, 2265 State Highway 7, Unadilla, N.Y. 13849 (ph 607 988-9013; www.enviroenergyny.com).