

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 page.

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](mailto:editor@farmshow.com).



Photos courtesy of USDA/ARS Stephen Ausmus

John Diener grows about 100 acres of prickly pear cactus on his California farm, where poor soil makes it nearly impossible to grow anything else.

## Cactus Thrive On Barren, Toxic Ground

If it weren't for prickly pear cactus, John Diener wouldn't know what to grow on about 100 of his California farm's 5,000 acres. The salt, selenium and boron levels in the soil, combined with the lack of water, make it nearly impossible to grow anything else.

So what do you do with prickly pear cactus? Turns out it's nutritious. Hispanic consumers peel the prickly leaves, which taste a bit like asparagus.

"The fruit is sweet, but it has lots of seeds," he says. "The pulp can be made into a powder for a nutrition-rich drink."

Diener gets technical assistance for research and development from Gary Bañuelos, an Agricultural Research Service plant/soil scientist with the USDA.

Bañuelos has worked with Diener for 20 years, analyzing plant nutrition and growth responses to poor quality growing soils in order to develop 4 (patented) cultivars that tolerate salt and boron, and are stickerless.

"One of the benefits is that they take up small quantities of selenium. Research indicates that selenium is an antioxidant that can be beneficial for things such as intestinal cancers."

Diener grows a variety of crops on his good soils – from vegetable crops to grapes, to almonds, wheat and alfalfa. With California's strict regulations about not discharging any toxic material (including selenium) into the state's water system, Diener tiles his salty/selenium soil, captures the water, and mixes it with fresh water in drip irrigation on about 10 acres of cactus plants.

The cacti are planted like an orchard in rows 12 ft. apart. Full grown, the cactus plants can reach 10 ft. tall and spread out 5 ft. About their third year, they start to bear fruit for about 15 years. Fruit colors range from yellow, green, orange, red and purple, and the fruit is similar in texture to kiwi, but



Cactus is planted in rows 12 ft. apart and can reach 10 ft. tall. It starts to bear fruit after about 3 years.

with bigger seeds. Some consider the prickly pear cactus fruit a natural laxative, Bañuelos says.

As he and Diener work together on the best growing practices, they continually face one challenge.

"The gophers are a pain in the root," Bañuelos says. No matter if the plants are small or large, pocket gophers do their damage underground, chewing on roots and killing the plants.

Despite the challenge, the cactus provides an opportunity to grow a crop on hundreds of acres in the San Joaquin Valley's west side that would otherwise be barren, Bañuelos says.

Diener's goal is to make it profitable, and he has started developing a market for processed cactus fruit as a supplement. If things go well, he has another 80 acres of similar ground to plant. He also grows 10 acres of vegetables such as broccoli, cabbage and kale that pull organic selenium from the soil.

"It's taking a negative piece of the farm and trying to make a positive out of it," he says.

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For a \$40 fee, "students" at Falster Farm & Cattle Ranch in Texas get an afternoon of hands-on education, which includes a stewing chicken with recipes to take home.

## "Farm School" Helps Sell Meat, Produce

Karl and Nancy Falster's "students" watched and listened carefully as the farm couple led them through the how-to's of poultry processing. For a \$40 fee each student gets an afternoon of hands-on education, farm-grown snacks, and a stewing chicken with recipes to take home.

"We don't do it so much for income as for education," says Nancy Falster about their farm's education efforts. She and her husband specialize in raising miniature cattle breeding stock.

Falster says the classes and events have proven to be a good way to advertise the beef, pork, chicken, vegetables and honey they produce organically.

The Falsters set up a work station on their concrete driveway next to running water and freezer access, and they use a killing cone and a mechanical plucker built by a friend to process the chickens. They limit the class size to 10.

Falster says she "advertises" by sending out an email to nearly 2,000 people on her list and through social media. People come from as far as 3 hrs. away in Dallas and Shreveport, so classes start in the early afternoon.

In addition to poultry processing, the

Falsters offer classes for cheese making, lard rendering, soap making and making bone broth (stock). They also hold a farm day with educational stations about herbs, pasture-raised pork, compost tea, chicken tractors and other farm topics.

"We offer educational opportunities to folks so they can begin the journey toward real health with real food," she says. Besides teaching at their own farm, the Falsters are available to teach at mini conferences for other producers.

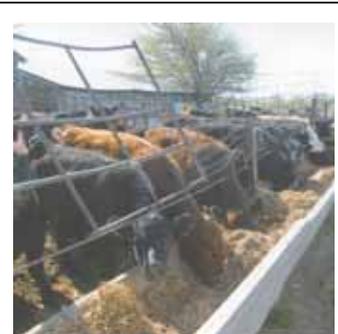
Falster adds that one of her most interesting "classes" started when she challenged supporters to skip going to the gym and work out at the farm. Since then a Falster Farm Fitness group has formed and members will be on hand for spring cleanup to pick up limbs and clean pastures for a "good bicyclic workout."

"The world is hungry for real life and real food," Falster says. "It's up to us farmers to introduce people to opportunities."

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To reduce ration costs, Tim Gogerty mixes haylage with corn screenings. His low-overhead facilities include bale bunkers and electric pen fences.



## No-Frills Feedlot

Tim Gogerty uses some cost-cutting ideas to offset sky-high prices for feeder cattle.

1. He buys 350-lb. calves and feeds them to about 650 lbs. (Lighter cattle and less time on feed better match his facilities and his bank loans.)
2. To reduce ration costs, he mixes haylage with corn screenings, which usually contain more kernel hearts and nutritive value than shelled corn. This year's haylage is winter rye, chopped in the early head stage for maximum nutrition. He followed the late May rye harvest with drilled soybeans.
3. Gogerty's 200-head backgrounding

operation includes separate pens for newly shipped-in calves to check for respiratory problems.

4. His low-overhead facilities include bale bunkers, electric pen fences, and a remodeled, unused farrowing house.
5. His low-overhead management includes hiring custom operators to plant and harvest crops on his 120-acre farm, instead of buying his own equipment.

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