

Wanted: Free Range And Pastured Egg Producers

John Brunnquell, Egg Innovations, is looking for a few good farmers willing to produce eggs from free range and pastured hens. He markets his eggs under the Blue Sky Family Farms label through Kroger, Wal-Mart, Whole Foods and other supermarket chains across the Midwest, Southeast and west to the Rocky Mountains.

"Our pasture-raised operations are all in Kentucky and southern Ohio, Indiana and Illinois," says Brunnquell. "All the pasture birds have access to a 50-acre pasture, 365 days a year."

Contract producers have the choice of raising them organically or on feed free of GMOs (genetically modified organisms). Brunnquell currently has 65 producers in 5 Midwestern states and a feed mill that produces 2 types of feed. The free range and pasture-raised designations are important to Brunnquell and not just a marketing gimmick. The "free range" birds are free to enjoy an 11-acre pasture anytime the weather is above 32 degrees. All the hens are free to bathe in the dust, scratch, perch and forage, behaviors that Brunnquell insists are important for chickens.

"Chickens are hardwired for those behaviors, and we believe in managing

animals consistent with how they are hardwired," he says. "Most people in the egg production business do what's best for the chicken. We do what's best for the chicken. We are passionate about family farms and animal welfare."

In addition to the pasture requirements and the feed options, Brunnquell's producers all share a common barn design. Each producer has to put up a new barn designed around the needs of laying hens and their natural behaviors. Each barn is 50 ft. wide and 520 ft. long and holds 20,000 hens.

Pastures, large and small, are bordered by 54-in. tall, woven wire fence. Birds are kept in at night, but daytime predator loss is close to zero.

"We lost 5 birds out of 1.3 million to hawks in 2015," says Brunnquell.

He says the investment for a new producer will run about \$800,000. However, the free range and pasture produced eggs get premium prices in the market.

"We offer some of the longest term contracts and highest returns in the industry," says Brunnquell. "Contract producers can be expected to produce gross income of up to \$140,000 each year."

Producers farther from the company



John Brunnquell is looking for farmers willing to produce eggs from free range and pastured hens. "Our birds have access to a 50-acre pasture all year long," he says.

headquarters have higher costs in both feed delivery and egg transportation.

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Dairy Farm Also Runs Profitable Wood Products Business

By Lorn Manthey, Contributing Editor

In 1947, Wisconsin dairy farmer Carl Nelson started hauling sawdust in his small pickup from a cabinet maker to local farmers. The income was a good supplement to his farm operation. Flash forward to 2016, and that same business is still going strong at the same farm, although operations have expanded dramatically.

Zach Schauf, great grandson of Carl Nelson, now manages the wood products business, called Indianhead Renewable Forest Products. The operation produces wood shavings and other products for about 100 bulk-sale customers in Wisconsin and Minnesota. It's located on the Schauf family farm, which has a milking herd of 80 to 90 dairy cattle, about 800 tillable acres and 200 acres of woodland. Zach's parents Karyn and Bob oversee that business.

Schauf says Indianhead handles about 4,000 truck loads of wood products in and out of their facility each year. About 80 percent of their business is producing shavings used by dairy and poultry producers. They also supply wood products for bio-fuels, landscaping and have a portable grinder.

Schauf says "Our operation has a special bond with its farmer customers because our

family has its own dairy herd and we know what people want and can use." Shavings are available in different sizes and can be made from different wood species.

The shavings plant has a 650 hp horizontal grinder, a tub grinder, a hammermill that produces small wood flakes, and a planer that handles cordwood. A drying system is fueled by wood fines from the processing operation. Shavings are dried down to about 7 percent moisture and stored in a large moisture-free warehouse.

Schauf took an interest in the wood products business when he was very young. At age 12 he started bagging shavings for farmers showing livestock at fairs. He paid neighbor kids to help him, and when he graduated from the University of Minnesota with a business degree, he joined the business. Knowing Zach and his wife Brooke would be the next generation to carry on the business, the family invested in a state-of-the-art shavings plant that offered more flexibility and more capacity.

"Our plant uses mostly poplar and pine, but we also have access to basswood, soft maple and birch. Some of the wood we harvest ourselves, but most is supplied by about 20 local vendors," Schauf says.



Zach Schauf and several family members operate a dairy farm and also process wood and wood products for livestock bedding and landscaping.

Indianhead has never had to advertise. Schauf says his parents, grandparents and great grandfather always found new customers through referrals, and the company still does that today. "People call us and we produce and deliver what they want," Schauf says.

Another key to their business success is having 22 employees who know what they're doing and take pride in their work. Some have more than 16 years of tenure and most can work at the dairy, in the farming operation, or in the wood business. "It's never boring around here. There's always plenty to do and our people aren't afraid to put forth extra

effort," Schauf says.

Even though some of their smaller dairy customers have gone by the wayside in recent years, Indianhead still does business with big dairies that use shavings for calves and young stock. The company also provides mulch and wood chips for landscaping and sells chips to schools and power plants who use it for fuel.

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"Broken Heart" Chickens On The Endangered List

Crevecoeur (translation: Broken Heart) chickens are among the oldest standard-bred fowls of France, originating in a small town in Normandy. According to The Livestock Conservancy the breed is on the critical endangered list.

Michelle and Irving Standing Chief, owners of Tanglewood, allow visitors to see Crevecoeur chickens up close by appointment at their "Wild West Town" of miniature and rare breed farm animals.

Interested in saving rare breeds, they have had the shy, black chickens for many years. Originally dual-purpose birds, they

are now considered more ornamental, though some people buy them for backyard birds to provide medium-size eggs, Michelle Standing Chief says.

"All of ours come to us when we throw out chicken food. If they are hand-raised as chicks, they will let you pick them up," she says. "We do keep ours enclosed in the hen house. They do not like the cold or wet and are not as hardy in the winter as other breeds of chickens. They're great foragers and the hens are wonderful, protective mothers."

With small, fine bones Crevecoeurs are moderate size (females at 6.5 lbs. and males

about 8 lbs.). They have a V-shaped comb, very white meat on the breast, and very dark leg meat.

Some U.S. breeders are interested in bringing back the original characteristics to make the Crevecoeur chicken a meat and egg bird and not just an exotic chicken.

To learn more about the breed or to see more photos, check out the Tanglewood website.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Tanglewood, 171 Tanglewood Dr., Canton, Georgia 30115 (ph 770 667-6464; www.tanglewood.farm; info@tanglewood.farm).

