

# Butcher Sells Meat From German Vending Machine

By Dee Goerge, Contributing Editor

Persistence paid off for Rick Reams; he is the first butcher in the U.S. to import a meat vending machine from Germany. Two of them were filled and running before Memorial Day in front of his business, RJ's Meats in Hudson, Wis. With 44 slots, he can fill the machines with up to 500 packages of meat.

"The size of the package doesn't matter. I can adjust every 3 millimeters whether it's for bacon or pot roast," Reams says.

The machine's versatility to dispense everything from his popular burger blend to his prize winning sausages, brats and wieners, caught his attention the minute he saw one at an international meat trade show in Germany. That was four years ago, when the European manufacturer, Regiomat, wasn't ready to sell to North America.

At the 2016 trade show, Reams connected with a salesman, who had attended the University of Wisconsin-River Falls. Reams convinced him that RJ's Meat should be the first U.S. buyer.

The refrigerated machines have many safety features including UV-protected, triple pane safety glass. He places them under his shop's overhang out of the direct sun, and there are food safety measures in place. For example, if the temperature goes too high, the machine won't dispense anything. Reams can also be notified through his phone, or be informed when it needs to be restocked with product or change. The machines are set up for cash or credit cards, with the prices the same as in the shop.

Memorial Day was extra busy, and Reams added products three times. He notes the

items that sell changes from day to day.

"On Sunday bacon was selling like crazy, but not much sold on Memorial Day," he says.

Though it was a substantial investment (about half the cost of his first home), Reams anticipates a two-year payback. But the biggest payback may be customer service and a little more personal time. Customers who commute to the Twin Cities in Minnesota have been asking for later hours (after 7 p.m.) Monday-Saturday and longer hours on Sunday. After nearly three decades of running the family-owned business, Reams didn't want to take away more personal time from his family or employees. The vending machine extends the hours and is convenient for customers who need to shop early in the morning or at night.

"Reception has been fantastic," Reams says, noting he has seen postings of customers taking selfies with the vending machines. An acquaintance reported that he saw seven people waiting in line in the rain.

Though Reams doesn't know if customers will wait in line on cold winter days, the machines have frost heaters and work down to 20 degrees below zero.

Winter sales could be just as good, especially during Viking and Green Bay Packer football games. And he can only speculate what meat needs fans will have during the 2018 Super Bowl in Minneapolis, less than 30 miles away.

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Butcher Rick Reams uses a vending machine he imported from Germany to sell meat direct to customers. It dispenses everything from his popular burger blend to prize winning sausages, brats and wieners.

## Ride-On, 1-Row Corn Planter

Last spring 9-year-old Luke Auer of Broadview, Mont., decided to make a little money by raising sweet corn.

To make planting easier, he and his dad, Mitch, and grandfather Les rigged up a 3-pt. mounted, 1-row, ride-on corn planter using parts they salvaged from an old Deere 7100 corn planter. They pulled it behind their New Holland 100 hp. loader tractor.

They removed one of the row units from the planter and stripped away the metering drive and seed box, leaving the disc openers, gauge wheels and closing wheels intact. Then they used box tubing to build a 3-pt. mounting bracket and welded it to the front end of the row unit. They mounted a seat and seat belt off a utility tractor in place of the seed box, and installed a funnel attached to a seed tube in front of the seat and just above the disc openers.

"It was a fun project," says Mitch. "We built it because we farm only with big equipment and don't own a corn planter any more. Luke used the unit to plant several batches of sweet corn over a 3 to 4-week period. He planted 200 to 400 seeds each time and dropped 50 seeds per row.

"We counted out the seeds before we went to the field and put them in a bowl. In the



Last spring 9-year-old Luke Auer planted sweet corn using this 3-pt. mounted, 1-row, ride-on corn planter built by his dad and grandfather.

field, Luke picked up one seed at a time and dropped it into the funnel. We live in a dry climate so we tried to space the seeds about 18 in. apart in the row."

Mitch says Luke plans to sell his home-grown sweet corn to neighbors and also on Facebook.

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## Turning Acorns Into Human Food

Acorns look like they should taste good but if you've ever bitten into one, you know they've got a bitter taste. In recent years some food experimenters around the country have been coming up with new methods to turn acorns into human food.

Wild food expert, Dr. John Kallas, of Portland, Oregon, offers classes on preparing acorns. He teaches techniques to break open the flexible shell, identify bad acorns, remove the tannins (which cause the bitter taste), and dry the nuts in a way that avoids mold (www.wildfoodadventures.com).

Sue Chin, owner of Sue's Acorn Café in Martinez California, sells breads, biscotti, and muffins made with acorn flour. She hand grinds acorns into flour. The flour sells for about \$30 a pound, perhaps a bargain for all the work involved. Chin is from South Korea, where acorns have long been a traditional part of local diets (www.buyacornflour.com).

Hank Shaw is the author of several books, including "Hunt, Gather, Cook: Finding the Forgotten Feast". Continually on the hunt for unconventional food sources, Hank holds workshops around the country and his website displays such delicacies as acorn dumplings and acorn maple shortbread cookies (www.honest-food.net).

In a good year, a large oak tree can produce 2,000 lbs. of nuts. Acorns are low in fat, high in B vitamins, rich in protein, and a decent carbohydrate. Depending on the type of oak, fat content can range from 1 percent to 32 percent with a protein content

of 2 percent to 8 percent.

When gathering acorns, many nuts have to be discarded because they're cracked and may have worms or oak weevils. Shelling the acorns and ridding them of tannin is the second step. They should be shelled under water because the nuts oxidize and rapidly turn brown. Tannin is best removed by placing the nuts in a water bath for 2 weeks, changing the water daily.

Once the tannin is gone, the acorns can be treated much like other tree nuts. They can be roasted for nibbling, chopped into pieces, ground into grits, or made into flour.

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