

Natural Wool Cleaning Tools

Making household cleaning tools out of wool began as a sideline for Jo Andrews. After seeing a wool duster at a sheep association meeting in Iowa, she started making them and selling them at craft shows around Northwest Missouri. After attending a wholesale market in 1983, she came home with a sales rep, \$300 worth of orders, and the beginnings of a real business. Thirty-five years later, her sons Allen and Jeff, along with relatives and neighbors, continue to run Wool Shop, the only remaining U.S. business to manufacture and sell wool cleaning products.

"Each fiber is tough and collects dust," says Jeff Andrews, vice president of Wool Shop. More dust catches on the overlapping scales on wool fiber compared to the smooth surface of synthetic fibers.

For quality and consistency, Wool Shop buys tanned wool from Merino cross sheep from an Australian source. The fiber has a protective film to make it scratch resistant, yet is durable for years of use.

"These are great maintenance dusters. After you are done dusting, take it outside and gently tap it against something, then twirl it to fluff it back up," Andrews says. "We also have a duster brush to straighten the fibers to fluff it up and separate fibers. You can also hand-wash it with duster shampoo."

Wool Shop makes a diverse line of products from 5-in. to 25-ft. dusters on hardwood, steel and aluminum handles (the 24-in. duster at \$12 is popular) to mop heads to commercial dusters with durable plastic telescopic handles. They also have specialty items such as ceiling fan dusters, wooly wands to clean refrigerator coils, and dust mitts - all made



Jo Andrews, along with sons Allen and Jeff, operates Wool Shop, the only remaining U.S. business that manufactures and sells wool cleaning products.

with wool.

"We sell (wholesale) to a lot of different stores and to a catalog company in Germany," Andrews says. Retail customers can call the Wool Shop to find out if there are any stores in their area, or order through the business' online store.

Customers appreciate that the dusters and other cleaning tools use natural products and that Wool Shop is a family business

that has been around for more than three decades. Wool Shop also works with sheep associations and other groups that want to sell their products for fundraising.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Jeff Andrews, Lambswool Products, 21935 Highway E., Grant City, Mo. 64456 (ph 660 564-2444; www.woolshop.com; sales@woolshop.com).

Polish-Built Berry "Combine" Speeds Up Harvest

When our friend Sidney Stubbs from Canada passed along some pictures of a Polish combine harvesting haskap berries on the Alberta prairies, we decided to check it out. With 19,000 haskap bushes in their Broken Tine Orchard, Kreg and Lee-Anne Alde needed a mechanical harvester.

"We saw one working at the University of Saskatchewan where our haskaps were originally developed," says Kreg.

The harvesters are manufactured in Poland by Weremczuk Agromachines. They were developed for all types of soft berries, from currants to aronia berries, haskaps and even rose hips. Models range from half-row pull-behind units to full-row and self-propelled units.

The Aldes chose a pull-behind unit designed to harvest both low and high bushes. Tines shake the berries loose from the bushes to drop onto a conveyor that carries them to boxes on a rear platform. Along the way, leaves are blown off, and the berries are sorted.

The harvester has a hydraulic hitch, side platform for tote storage, and a small bush attachment for young plants. A transport hitch allows the machine to be towed at road speeds.

Will Stafford, Forest Fringe Orchards, is an authorized dealer for the Polish-built harvesters. He also uses them on his 60+ acres of fruit bushes. He says the machines are built to order.

"The buyer chooses the components and makes a 25 percent deposit in U.S. dollars," says Stafford. "The company then starts construction and final payment is made prior to shipment."

Stafford suggests buyers order in groups of 2 to lower shipping costs as 2 machines fit a container. A Joanna Premium harvester, as they're called, has a base price of \$34,250. Attachments for use specifically with haskaps start at \$953. A wide variety of other options are available.

"We always have some losses," says Alde. "It would be under 10 percent with perfect plants that are 6 ft. tall and 4 to 5 ft. wide. Low branches are always a problem."

The Aldes first used their harvester when their bushes were about 4 years old. Alde admits that haskaps are a long-term investment. Once planted, it is 5 years before they provide a return and 10 years before you have your capital back. However, with pruning, haskap bushes should produce for 70 years.



Pull-type combine harvests half a row of haskap or aronia berries with each pass. Tines shake berries loose from bushes to drop onto a conveyor, which carries them to boxes on a rear platform.

Joanna Premium harvesters are sold in Canada by: Forest Fringe Orchards, P.O. Box 472, Prince Albert, Sask. Canada S6V 5R8 (ph 306 929-2091; www.forestfringeorchards.ca); and in the U.S. by: Aronia Berry Services

of NE Iowa, P.O. Box 101, Fairbank, Iowa 50629 (ph 319 240-4104; Dean@absnei.com; www.aroniaberrieservicesofneiova.com).

"Rent The Chicken" Looking For Business Partners

Phil and Jenn Tompkins, owner of Rent The Chicken, moved from the city to rural western Pennsylvania with the goal of working from home. They discovered that renting chickens was on the Small Business Administration's "crazy business idea" list, and they were surprised to learn even their farm-raised friends had a hard time raising backyard chickens.

"After market research, we hatched Rent The Chicken," Tompkins says. "It's a great on-farm business opportunity for people who want to sign up as affiliates and provide chickens to people in their area."

By the spring of 2014 the couple was delivering coops, chickens and food as far away as Ohio and the New Jersey coast. Their first affiliate was a motivated teenager in high school who built the coops to the Tompkins' specs and followed their protocol. By the 2018 season there were more than 40 affiliates in several states and in Canada.

"Our business is different because we

have one central phone number," says Jenn, who handles all the calls and coordinates with affiliates. "The same services are offered anywhere. For our affiliates we offer more than just our name. We have online courses to attend, check lists and preparation steps."

The basic rental package comes with 2 chickens, a portable coop on wheels, water dish and food for 5 or 6 months. It costs \$400 with free delivery within 50 miles. The four-chicken package runs \$600.

Customers vary widely, Tompkins says, from single retired and empty nesters to young families and college graduates.

"It's any demographic," Tompkins says. "They all have in common that they want to have a food source closer to their table, or have their kids experience it. About 50 percent adopt or commit to the same chickens the following season."

A high percentage of the 50 percent who don't continue often develop a homesteading mindset and buy chickens on their own.

To educate more people, the Tompkins



Phil and Jenn Tompkins say "Rent The Chicken" is a great on-farm business opportunity for people who want to provide chickens to others in their area.

recently added Hatch The Chicken, a 5 week rental of incubator and brooder equipment. It's especially popular with day care and senior care centers, Tompkins says.

The couple has also started a retail line of Amish-built coops, chicken swings,

teeter totters and other toys at www.thechickennetwork.com.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Phil and Jenn Tompkins, Rent The Chicken (ph 724 305-0782 U.S.; 844 310-8782 Canada; www.rentthechicken.com).