

24/7 Fresh Meat Vending Machine

Joshua Applestone is on a mission to provide easily accessible and affordable meat to hungry eaters around Stone Ridge and Accord, New York. In 2018 he and his wife Jessica introduced Applestone Meat Company vending machines that dispense steaks, pork, lamb, sausages and ground beef 24 hrs. a day. He says all the meat is sourced from farmers who are committed to the well-being of their animals and raise them without hormones or antibiotics.

Applestone says vending sales let people shop when meat markets and grocery stores aren't open. Applestone machines hold about 150 items and are so popular they sometimes need to be restocked several times a day. He's now developing new machines that will hold up to 1,000 items and be easier and more intuitive to operate.

No stranger to trying things different, Applestone and his wife opened Fleisher's Grass-Fed & Organic Meats in Kingston,

New York in 2004. They butchered all the animals themselves using what Applestone calls a "nose-to-tail" philosophy that eliminates waste while maintaining outstanding quality. Consumer acceptance was outstanding not only for the products, but for learning new cooking techniques in classes the business ran. Fleishers now has 4 locations in New York.

Applestone also set up entry level, intermediate and advanced level classes on butchering techniques for pork, beef and poultry. He says training tomorrow's butchers is the key to strengthening and growing the sustainable meat movement. More than 20 businesses in 9 states, Canada, Peru and even Russia have attended his classes.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Applestone Meat Co., 3607 Main St., Stone Ridge, N.Y. 12484 (www.applestonemeat.com).



Butcher Joshua Applestone and his wife have installed vending machines that sell steaks, pork, lamb, sausages and ground beef 24 hrs. a day.

Raw Milk Vending Machines

European dairymen are generating more income by selling bulk raw milk directly to consumers from vending machines.

The machines, made by DF Italia in Northern Italy, are typically located at farmers markets, near shopping centers or schools, and sometimes right at a dairy farm. The company produces several models ranging from starter units about the size of a refrigerator, to much larger ones that are about 9 ft. tall, 14 ft. wide and 7 ft. deep. The machines cost from \$8,000 to \$25,000 and are typically housed inside covered metal or wooden 3-sided enclosures.

A milk producing farmer buys a vending machine, obtains the required licenses, has the machine inspected as needed, and keeps it stocked. It's a way for a producer to sell his product direct to consumers without middleman intervention and achieve far more income in the process.

European consumers pay about \$1.50 a quart to fill their own containers. That figures out to about \$6 per gal., far more than what they usually receive for milk from conventional processors.

The raw milk supply in self-serve machines, typically with butterfat up to 4.2 percent, is held in bulk containers ranging in size from 50 to 160 gal. Machines are well-



DF Italia vending machines are set up at farmers markets or near shopping centers and schools, where customers can stop day or night to buy milk.

insulated and keep the milk at 37 degrees, regardless of extreme outside temperatures. Mechanical agitation and the constant cool temperature keeps milk fresh for up to a week, but the popularity of vending requires some machines to be refilled daily.

Maintaining a clean, sanitary machine is the producer's responsibility, with some farmers using a smart phone app that logs sales information, monitors milk levels, and provides alerts if the machine malfunctions. Inspectors have key access at any time, and consumers seem to be using the machines with increasing regularity.

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Producer Co-Op Sells Grass-Fed Beef

Wisconsin Meadows eliminates the hassles for Wisconsin farmers producing grass-fed beef. The producer co-op started with a handful of producers in one county and now handles processing and marketing for beef produced by close to 200 members in more than 55 counties in the state.

"After years of selling at farmers markets and direct to the consumer, it was great to have a salesman who calls on restaurants and stores to market your beef," says Rod Ofte, a founding member and also general manager of the co-op.

Ofte markets most of the 100 head he finishes out on grass yearly through the co-op. He and other co-op members produce grass-fed beef raised without the use of hormones or antibiotics. Rotational grazing is strongly encouraged. The co-op requires a strict protocol of how animals are raised and cared for, including approved supplements.

Beef is marketed wholesale to grocers, co-ops and restaurants, as well as for home delivery in Wisconsin. When ready to market, the co-op handles processing at USDA-inspected plants close to producers and pays members according to the quantity and quality of the beef produced.

"For the first 5 years we had one price fits all, but we lost customers due to the uneven quality and supply," says Ofte. "Now we pay premiums based on quantity produced and on grade at processing from choice to fair."

He notes that 20 percent of the members produce 80 percent of the beef, with most coming from 5 members. He adds the largest producers also produce the most consistent quality.

"You need to have a system that rewards quality and quantity," says Ofte. "With the old pricing system, we had to beg for product from producers. That's no longer the case."

Another change made since the co-op started is the membership fee. At first members paid an initial \$200 fee to join, which they could request back if they left. "We undervalued the partnership and didn't appreciate start-up costs," says Ofte. "We changed the fees to \$500 to join with only \$200 refunded if the member quits."

Leadership is critical, as is funding, he adds. "You need a key group of leaders who are willing to sacrifice time and effort to the organization," he says. "We had a volunteer



Wisconsin Meadows co-op handles processing and marketing for beef produced by about 200 farmer members in the state.

board of directors who were instrumental in moving us forward as an organization."

While sales built, Ofte often made deliveries for the co-op. "One of the board members was an accountant, and he handled our books and cut the checks," says Ofte. "However, you need a professional account manager who can build distribution and sales. You also need to know your key brand differences. In our case, our marketing manager is also a beef producer who understands the product."

A grant from the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection helped with start up.

"A number of members put in their own money also, but for the past 5 years we've been profitable," he says.

In addition to marketing members' beef, the co-op tries to help improve quality. "We have panels at our meetings on what to do to produce the best beef," says Ofte. "We've had people join who have never had cattle before."

While the co-op has no interest in expanding membership outside the state, they continue to add members in Wisconsin. They are also expanding their product line with the addition of pasture-raised pork.

Ofte gives presentations on how Wisconsin Meadows was formed to like-minded producer groups. Ofte says he is also available as a paid consultant to provide more in-depth assistance in setting up a similar co-op in other states.

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Missouri Organic Feed Operation Takes Off

"We started by becoming a certified, 100 percent organic facility servicing a few dairy operations and have expanded into beef, poultry, hogs, sheep, and goats, which has made our operation boom," says Abby Peterson, business manager of Peterson Organic Feeds in Missouri.

After a local feed mill closed in Joplin, not far from the Petersons, a handful of organic and non-GMO dairy operations approached owner Paul Peterson about getting into the feed business. "We didn't want to compete with other local mills so we tapped into the growing need for organic feed," says Peterson.

The Peterson's feed is certified organic by Ecocert ICO, LLC and qualifies for the USDA official stamp of approval. "Some labels may say and claim to be organic, but the only foolproof way to know is by looking for the 'USDA Organic' stamp," says Peterson. "This seal certifies that the facility has gone through the extensive processes required to be officially recognized as organic producers."

To meet certification requirements the Petersons must buy from certified organic

suppliers and farmers, and pass periodic audits. "Being organic means that the products in the feed are completely natural, without fertilizers, pesticides, or herbicides," says Peterson.

Peterson is also happy to say they try to source as many of their ingredients from local producers as possible. "About 60 percent comes from Missouri farms, and some things we get from neighboring states," says Peterson. Feeds are blended according to their customers' needs, made fresh and made to order. Products are sold from their mill and customers either pick up their order or have it delivered.

Peterson's mill doesn't have a livestock nutritionist on site, but they work closely with some in the area. They can blend anything the customer is looking for using grains, dry leafy greens and grasses, minerals, herbs, molasses, and fishmeal.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Peterson Organic Feeds, 314 E. 1st Street, Mountain Grove, Missouri 65711 (ph 512 525-5672; www.petersonorganicfeeds.com).