

Cash In With “Farm Camp” Rentals

Allen Easterly got into the campground rental business the easy way, using an online service called Hipcamp. Easterly rents out 6 camping sites on Rendezvous Farm, his 16-acre hobby farm in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. He also rents out his own RV, as well as Tiny Rose, a cabin he and his wife built on the frame of an old camper.

“We started renting sites out through Hipcamp 2 years ago,” says Easterly. “We’ve had nothing but good people rent and no problems at all.”

Easterly stumbled on Hipcamp when looking for campgrounds on the internet. Hipcamp and Tentrr (Vol. 43, No. 1) are 2 of a growing number of services that match those wanting to camp with private sites. An estimated 75 million U.S. households camp each year, up 58 percent from 2014.

“I thought it looked like a pretty good way to bring in a little extra income,” he says. “While you can set up your own camping management system for your campground, you’ll have to manage bookings, buy

insurance and deal with folks showing up unannounced. Organizations like Hipcamp handle bookings, cancellations, payments, refunds and listing your campground on their website.”

Landowners like Easterly submit their properties to the organization and set up an account. They establish the price they want to charge. Prices range from \$40 to \$250 per night, depending on amenities and nearby attractions. Hipcamp keeps 10 percent of the rental fee.

Easterly charges \$30 for his campsites, \$80 for the Tiny Rose trailer, and \$110 for his Winnebago motor home. He provides technical camping support and firewood. Eggs, chicken and rabbit meat raised on the farm are extra.

“Since we are close to Washington, D.C., we get a lot of city folks who don’t know how to start a fire or use a camp stove,” says Easterly. “They love the idea of camping on a farm where the kids can interact with our animals and occasionally see wild animals. I was really surprised how amazed city folk



Allen Easterly uses an online service called Hipcamp to make extra cash, by renting out camp sites on his hobby farm.

are by a simple vegetable garden.”

Landowners are required to carry commercial insurance or qualify to be covered under the Hipcamp Insurance Policy. If the property is less than 20 acres, they are also required to have toilet facilities available to tent campers, but not RVs.

“We have really enjoyed meeting new

people and helping them appreciate a nice escape from their everyday hectic lives,” says Easterly. “And the best part is we get paid for it.”

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Hunters can purchase pheasants from Zabala, then take them to a nearby dog training area and hunt the birds.

Farmer Provides Pheasants To Hunters

Nick Zabala offers a free bonus service with the pheasants he raises and sells. Located in Alliance, Ohio, his Sunrise Harvest Pheasant Farm is only five minutes away from one of Ohio’s 11 designated dog training areas. That means hunters can purchase pheasants from Zabala, then take them to the 100+ acre area to train a dog and hunt the birds. Hunting is open in those areas with just a hunting license throughout the year. Both hens and roosters can be taken with no bag limits.

Customers appreciate Zabala’s operation because it is less expensive than joining a club with membership and other fees.

“With me you just pay for the birds. I have no minimum purchase. I try not to oversell, and then they come back,” he says, adding he also shows customers how to place birds for the best training.

Zabala recalls his frustration about rarely seeing pheasants when he was young and hunting with his dad.

“I just wanted to see pheasants all the time,” Zabala says. So he decided to raise them at his home in Cleveland. He started with 10-week-old chicks, then tried eggs and chicks. There was a learning curve to figure out incubating and how to keep small chicks healthy and safe from predators. When there were too many for his space he placed an ad and they sold quickly. When he did it a second time, asking for a higher price, they still sold quickly.

Zabala saw an opportunity, took a gamble, quit his good-paying job, and moved to the country where he works as a driving instructor and hatches about 3,000



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pheasant chicks a year in 20 batches starting in March. He sells another 100 dozen eggs to people who want to incubate their own birds.

“I can ship eggs (\$10/dozen) all over the U.S. Chicks (\$2/each) are shipped to one-day points from my location,” he says, adding he also sells older chicks (\$5.25-\$10.25) and mature pheasants (\$12.25).

In addition to selling to hunters, many customers order pheasants for Thanksgiving or just to have in their home flocks.

Over the winter, Zabala separates his breeders, cleans pens, and takes orders that he starts filling in April. He’s made several YouTube videos (Sunrise Harvest Pheasant Farm) to help customers successfully hatch and raise pheasants.

“I’m doing this for fun. It’s not my main source of income,” Zabala says, admitting he is a little surprised how far the pheasant raising venture has taken him. The best thing, he says, is that now he sees pheasants every day.

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He Runs A Mushroom Business Out Of His Basement

Jerome Segura first attempted to grow mushrooms in December 2018 as a hobby and to save money by not having to buy them at the store. Within a year, after much trial and error, he developed a system to grow up to 60 lbs. of mushrooms in the basement of his Stevens Point, Wis., home, and sells mushrooms weekly to CSA customers, as well as at farmers markets and to restaurants.

The former professor at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point notes he had limited biology background when he began the venture. “I tried to grow white buttons and portabellas but just ended up with mold,” he recalls. Mushrooms may be a fungus, but they need extremely sanitized growing conditions. Steam is a common method, but expensive, so when Segura learned about an old sanitizing method using pickling lime, he was eager to try it. He also changed the types of mushrooms he grew and created a space with the right environment.

He remodeled a 7 by 11-ft. coal room in the basement with a vapor barrier and pvc shelving. He vented to the outside through an old window.

“I have a pond fogger in a 30-gal. barrel of water. It has 12 discs that can atomize 6 liters of water an hour so it looks like a cloud coming out,” he explains. Another 6-in. inline fan blows the air out of an old window in the coal room so that the Segura home’s air stays clean and not full of spore particles.

The humidity and temperature (ideally between 65 and 68 F) are crucial for growing mushrooms through stages of development, from seed to fully grown in about 21 days with additional growths 14 days apart. Segura starts with a substrate of wood pellets, bran and mushroom spawn with lime water in food-safe poly bags. He gets 2 or 3 “crops” of mushrooms off a block before the substrate has to be replaced.

Segura grows varieties of oyster mushrooms, including Italian and King oysters, as well as Freckled chestnut mushrooms, which is a family favorite. He also has had success with Lion’s Mane mushrooms, that are hard to grow and easy



Segura grows mushrooms year-around in his basement, selling them weekly to CSA customers as well as at farmers markets and to restaurants.

to contaminate. They are worth the effort as they are reported to help repair nerves and help check Alzheimers.

CSA clients pay \$120 for 1 lb. of mushrooms per week for 12 weeks. Overall, between farmers markets and restaurant sales, the mushrooms sell for \$10 to \$16/lb. At full production, Segura says his small mushroom growing space can produce and gross about \$500/week.

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