

Beef Goes From His Farm To His Traveling Food Truck

As a lifelong “foodie”, DuWayne Ditterich first got the idea of owning a food truck when he was a kid. Now, at 48, he is living out that dream with The Smoke Wagon which serves up beef brisket and other beef products that he raises on his 1,000-acre Vergas, Minn., farm.

“We’re farm-to-plate 100 percent,” he says. “We’re fully self-contained and integrated. A calf is born on the farm and served by us out of a food trailer.”

His journey began in 2007 when he purchased the 160-acre farm that had been in his family but hadn’t been farmed since his grandfather owned it. Not happy with the quality of beef he found on the market, he decided to raise his own beef and came up with Angus crosses with Limousin and Simmental.

Three years ago, when a cousin said he thought Ditterich’s beef was the best he’d ever tasted, Ditterich was inspired to open a store on the farm to sell beef by the package, quarter or half. He increased his herd to about 40 cows, feeding out 150 head a year

(including cattle from two other ranchers.) The meat is butchered and packaged at a nearby locker plant. The farm store is open Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., and by appointment. While he does some shipping, most is sold locally - to restaurants, stores, and to local people or tourists visiting the many lakes that surround his farm.

To promote his beef, Ditterich puts on “sample” days at the farm cooking beef in a smoker. “People showed a lot of interest,” he recalls. “So when we had an opportunity to buy a food truck, I bought it on a whim.”

The 24-ft. long trailer turned out to be a good investment, with a quality commercial-grade smoker that easily passed inspection in 2019. Before the summer was over, he had cooked with it at 30 events in the area with the help of his three sons (ages 8 to 20) and his wife.

“I cook for the people, not for judges. I cook what people want, and we use high quality products,” he says.

Besides his own beef, he buys pork and chicken. Brisket and baby back ribs are



Ditterich bought this food truck, equipped with a smoker, to sell the beef he raises on his farm. Last summer he cooked at 30 different local events.

always on the menu. Depending on the occasion, he also makes prime rib, pulled pork, smoked shrimp and other entrees.

“Our product sells itself,” Ditterich says. He anticipates he’ll be working in the food truck 120 days in 2020 at town celebrations, fairs, weddings, reunions and other gatherings. Though that might become challenging as he still has farm chores including putting up 800 acres of hay, he is eager to pursue his

childhood dream.

“It’s kind of different,” he laughs. “I don’t know what I’m going to do when I grow up.”

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, DuWayne Ditterich, 43693 Co. Hwy. 41, Vergas, Minn. 56587 (ph 320 424-0291; www.ditterichfamilyfarm.com; ditterichfamilyfarm@gmail.com; Facebook: Ditterich Family Farm).

Family Keeps Windmills Spinning

Phil Gehman likes the quiet and great views as he installs and works on windmills that are up to 80 ft. tall.

“I love working on top. That’s my office,” says Gehman, who took over Great Plains Windmill Service in 2019. His family has been in the business since 2007, when Gehman’s father, Daryl, started the Iowa business. Turns out there’s plenty of demand and interest in windmills in the Midwest to keep him busy.

About 40 percent of the work is for practical purposes to pump water for livestock or off-grid and backup home use.

“People don’t realize that windmills are still being made,” Gehman says. “A brand new installed Aeromotor windmill costs about \$8,500 and is fully functioning to pump water. We often have used ones starting at \$6,500. Our goal is to put the windmill back on the map.”

Other customers want windmills for nostalgic or ornamental reasons. Family farms, especially, often want to restore a windmill that’s been in the family, or put up a new one as part of their heritage.

Great Plains services several hundred windmills each year and find the most common problem is just neglect.

“They are supposed to be serviced once a year, so if there’s no oil in the gearbox

the bearings wear out. When the bearings go out, the fan leans into the tower and it rips the fan blades off,” Gehman says. Brake failure is also a common problem when regular maintenance is neglected.

Since Aeromotor is still in business, parts are readily available, and the Gehmans rebuild many gearboxes. They can also repair other windmill models, using parts the Gehmans make in their machine and wood shop. Great Plains also offers annual maintenance contracts to make sure windmills keep running properly.

While workers usually climb the ladder on a windmill to work on the head, they use a crane to lay a windmill down to refurbish and paint the towers.

“The fans range from 6 to 20-ft. dia. and the towers from 15 to 80-ft. tall,” Gehman says. “The deeper the well the bigger the fan needed. A 600-ft. deep well requires a windmill tower with a 14-ft. fan.”

There is plenty of work in the Midwest, and Gehman travels regularly to the nine states surrounding Iowa and occasionally outside the region. Customers call, explain their situation and Great Plains gives them a cost estimate. They get to most jobs within 3 to 4 weeks.

The working season starts in March when workers oil and do annual maintenance work



“Our goal is to put the windmill back on the map,” says Phil Gehman, who operates a business installing and working on windmills up to 80 ft. tall.

for customers. After that they travel to repair and install windmills until December, or when weather makes it too difficult to work.

Gehman is proud of the family business and hopes it carries on for generations.

“We get out in rural areas and meet very friendly, down-to-earth folks. It’s really fun to grow a business in that sector of our country.

And they appreciate it,” Gehman says. “The windmill is an icon of the West and more people want to see them spin again.”

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Great Plains Windmill Service, 300 Hwy. 22, Kinross, Iowa 52335 (ph 319 325-2467; www.greatplainswindmills.com; greatplainswindmillsservice@gmail.com).

Sled Dog Business Provides Unique Experience

A champion sled dog racer in rural Minnesota started a booming business giving rides on sleds pulled by his dogs. Surprisingly, it’s a year-round business so lack of snow is not a problem. Ed K. Streeper and his wife, Amy, run Fun Sled Dog Rides out of Osage, Minn.

Streeper grew up in Fort Nelson, B.C., and competed in sprint sled dog racing for 4 decades. He is “the winningest musher of races in North America in the sport’s history” having competed in more than 100 different places from Laconia, N.H. to Canada and Alaska, in more than 400 races. Five years ago he started offering sled dog rides to the public.

“We offer sled dog rides to people of all

ages - no experience needed and no weight restrictions,” Streeper says.

He has plenty of old-style wooden sleds from the 1960’s to early 80’s. He also has toboggans, perfect for first-time riders. Each holds up to 4 adults or 6 kids. Another option is a double standup sled that lets riders feel like they are actually driving the team.

“We also offer a sled train for 3 to 5 sleds connected together that gets pulled by a snow machine. Each sled has one person standing on the runners holding the handle bar,” Streeper adds.

Living next to Smokey Hills State Forest, Streeper has trails from his property that go into the forest. He also takes his sleds and dogs to resorts, festivals and private events.

Besides traditional rides in the snow, Streeper has a Big People Mover on wheels. A team of 16 dogs can pull up to 9 adults in the wagon in other seasons.

Getting to meet some of Streeper’s nearly 100 sled dogs is a big part of the adventure. Crossed with hound lines and Canadian and Alaskan husky breeds, the dogs are 6 to 15 generations down from champion racers.

His website includes a video and information on rides available in every season.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Streeper Kennels, 26451 Co. Hwy. 39, Osage, Minn. 56570 (ph 218 573-3993; www.funsladdogrides.com; Facebook: Streeper Kennels).



Sled dog business provides rides on several different kinds of sleds.