

Money-Making Ideas To Boost Farm Income



Ice cutter's frame holds chainsaw in place and is pushed backward through the ice. Chainsaw is operated by a remote throttle.



Ice is sliced into 4 by 7-ft. sheets that are 8 to 12 in. thick.

Photos by Toni Ricci

Harvested Ice Blocks Keep Nursery Stock Cool

Schlabach's Nursery keeps nursery stock dormant with pond ice, harvesting it with a chain saw and ice rake. The ice is sliced into 4 by 7-ft. sheets that are 8 to 12 in. thick. They are grabbed by the ice rake and winched up a 60-ft. ramp. At the top of the ramp, the ice drops onto a wagon bed. Stacks of ice are then carried to storage by skid steers and forklifts.

"We started harvesting ice in 2005 with a plywood sled and a horse," recalls Abram Schlabach. "It evolved as we got into more commercial quantities."

The evolution included making a frame for a chainsaw so it can be pushed backward through the ice. The saw sits on a platform on the frame that the operator raises and lowers for ice depth. A remote throttle control lets the operator adjust engine speed on-the-go.

"We take the rakers off the chain, and it cuts fast, like a knife through butter," says Schlabach.

Other innovations included building the ramp out of pallets and covering it with sheet metal so the ice glides easily. The ice rake is a simple frame with 3 hooks that grab onto the ice sheet.

Once multiple sheets of ice are stacked on the wagon, they are picked up with specially adapted forks to unload.

"We make a small blade like a hockey skate blade and attach it to the side of each fork," says Schlabach. "It is the main secret in handling the ice. We used to use ratchet

straps, but we would lose 20 pieces or more a year, sliding off the forks. Plus, it took a lot of time strapping and unstrapping."

With the innovations, ice harvest is faster and safer. This past winter it started at 6:30 a.m. and was finished by 2:30 p.m. the same day.

"We harvested 233,000 lbs. of ice in 8 hours," says Schlabach. "In the past we would go all day and all night."

Schlabach and his brothers Andrew and Emanuel and father David put the ice to good use cooling nursery stock in their cold storage building. The ice goes into a 14 by 70-ft. room inside the building where it is stacked up to 8 ft. high on a single layer of pallets. Nursery stock is stored according to shipping dates in 2 adjoining rooms.

"When the air temperature starts to warm, we turn on a fan to push air across the ice and into the rest of the building," says Schlabach. "We try to keep the nursery stock around 40 degrees. As we ship stock out of a room, we close it down."

Schlabach and his family carry a wide variety of fruiting plants, including 40 varieties of apples, as well as custom propagating with around 400 different varieties of apples they maintain for that purpose. They also sell peaches, pears, plums, cherries and small fruits.

"We cover from zone 3 through zone 8 dwarf, semi-dwarf and full-size trees," says Schlabach.

The business started as a hobby of David's,



Sheets are grabbed by an ice rake and winched up a ramp and onto a wagon bed. Stacks of ice are then carried to storage by a forklift.



but turned into the family's primary farm business in 2000. As the business grew, the need for cooling to maintain dormancy until shipping grew as well.

"The ice saves a lot of money that would be used for alternative cooling and extends our shipping season by about a month and a half," says Schlabach. "If the winter is mild, we may not be able to harvest as much ice, but we'll ship earlier. If it's a bitter cold winter, we harvest more ice and ship later."

The family recently added a small ice vault. It is SIP-panel construction with 14 in. of Styrofoam insulation sandwiched by plywood. It is being used for the first time

this year to store scion wood. It will also be used to store fruit from the nursery's test orchard until it can be sold at their roadside stand.

"It has a 12-in. thick, commercial cooler door," says Schlabach. "It is so efficient, we've been told we'll have to throw out old ice when we refill next winter."

Request a catalog for a complete list of plants Schlabach Nursery carries and custom propagations.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Schlabach's Nursery, 2784 Murdock Rd., Medina, N.Y. 14103 (ph 585 798-6198).

Big Square Straw Bales Double "Wattle" Production

A few years ago Tim Gogerty started turning small square bales of straw into "wattles" used to control soil erosion by capturing sediment and spreading out the water (Vol. 37, No. 5). They're widely used on highway construction projects.

Gogerty recently nearly doubled his wattle production by building a much bigger grinder. His friend Randy Funke designed the machine specifically to handle big square bales.

Straw bales are carried on a conveyor and fed into a big steel beater. The flailed straw drops into a bin from which it is pressed into various diameter augers, compressed into circular chambers, and then pushed into biodegradable netting.

Tim's sons Jordan and Jason use hydraulic motors to control the machine and straw-feeding process. The wattles, which measure 9 in. dia. by 25 ft. long, are wrapped in clear plastic, placed on pallets, and shipped in enclosed semi trailer vans.

All the work is done inside a 55-ft. wide by 80-ft. hoop building.

"We haven't changed the basic design very much," says Tim. "Power is provided by an engine that we removed from a tractor. It sets outside the building to keep noise and exhaust out, and drives a hydraulic pump and motors that operate the machine.

"We use the same controls as before to start the machine and to advance the bale into the grinder, and to form the wattles. It takes 3 people to make everything work. One person operates the machine, and the others roll the finished wattles into coils, then double strap them and stack them on a wood pallet. Then they shrink wrap them.

Tim says he sells most of the wattles to contractors who work for the state, but also sells some to local farmers.

"Most of the straw we use is imported from Canada. We process about 500 tons of straw per year, and in a busy week we can go through a semi load of big square bales in 10 days," notes Tim.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Tim Gogerty, 33094 K. Ave., Hubbard, Iowa 50122 (ph 641 487-7825).



Tim Gogerty built this machine to pack big square straw bales into erosion control "wattles", doubling his previous production.