

## “Solar Grazing” Pays Off For Sheep Producers

As rural electric associations across the country set up big “solar farms” in rural areas, operators had to find a way to keep the weeds down. That created a new opportunity for sheep producers.

Already there are more than 4,000 acres of solar sites maintained with sheep in the U.S. Sheep producer Lexie Hain in Ithaca, N.Y., contracts her sheep out to 4 solar sites in New York state. She and other sheep producers have spent time with solar company officials, educating them about the advantages of sheep grazing over mechanical mowing.

“Especially on rougher terrain, the sheep just do such a better job compared to mechanical equipment,” Hain says, who believes so much in the idea that she founded the American Solar Grazing Association (ASGA).

In areas like North Carolina and New York it takes 2 to 4 sheep per acre. Since solar fields are surrounded by chain link or other secure fencing, sheep are safely fenced in. But producers also set up portable fencing for rotational grazing. Water and minerals in cube containers are also portable to move with the sheep.

In addition to regular checks on her flocks, Hain works closely with electrical service maintenance workers to educate them. Signs and reminders to keep the gate shut are important.

Sheep graze throughout the growing season, with the service costing \$325 to \$555 per acre.

Hain stresses the need to account for the work it requires and to charge appropriately. ASGA is available to help with sample



Sheep producers can contract with “solar farms” to control weeds.

contracts, educational videos and links.

She recommends checking out the YouTube video, Solar Grazing 101, and the ASGA website for more information.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Lexie Hain, American Solar Grazing Association, 863 Hays Rd., Ithaca, N.Y. 14850 (www.solargrazing.org; info@solargrazing.org).

## He Builds Caskets With Special Care

For Enos Swartzentruber, his rural Long Prairie, Minn., business isn’t just about handcrafting caskets. It’s also a mission to educate and support people going through a difficult time. Based on his Christian faith he refers to the caskets as “to go boxes.” The business name, Living Hope Woodwork, LLC, reflects that.

“One thing I do with every casket as it’s being built is to pray for the soul of the body that will rest in there. My desire is for people to be ready and to know where their box comes from and that it is made in a godly environment. It’s personal.”

A former member of an Amish community in Ohio, Swartzentruber worked with wood growing up - from cutting trees, to sawing lumber, to making furniture and helping build caskets for community members. He still occasionally saws down trees, and loves transforming rough lumber into items that showcase the wood’s natural beauty.

He makes the caskets from pine, oak and cedar cut locally and sawed at his nephew’s sawmill. He makes the caskets, and his wife, Mary, sews the linings. The couple has a

showroom on their farm with caskets for people to choose from, but also do custom caskets, sometimes using lumber provided by customers that has a special meaning to them.

Living Hope caskets are priced reasonably: pine \$850; oak (and oversized) \$1,500; and cedar \$1,750. In Minnesota there is no sales tax with direct casket sales. One area funeral home stocks the caskets and a couple other funeral homes offer them to clients. Word-of-mouth advertisement and local radio ads have given Living Hope plenty of local exposure, and Swartzentruber delivers caskets for free up to 50 miles and charges reasonable fees for greater distances. Out-of-state customers have picked up caskets at his shop.

Besides making and selling caskets and urns, Swartzentruber hands out a booklet, *Shopping for Funeral Services*, available to everyone for free from the Federal Trade Commission. He also has a Funeral Planning Rights link on his website. Having information about funeral planning rights helps remove the fear of the unknown, he notes.



Enos Swartzentruber finds satisfaction in building handcrafted wooden caskets. Based on his Christian faith, he refers to them as “to go boxes”.

People are welcome to call ahead and schedule a time to see caskets in the showroom, Swartzentruber says. Photos are also on the business’ website.

Besides making caskets, Swartzentruber builds custom cabinets and furniture and is a part-time driver. But he finds the most satisfaction in his casket-building.

“I was praying and searching for something

to do that was a need for the community. I kept coming back to caskets,” he says.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Enos Swartzentruber, Living Hope Wood Caskets, 19078 Co. Rd. 11, Long Prairie, Minn. 56347 (ph 320 533-0611; www.livinghopewoodcaskets.com; leftylhw@gmail.com).

## Mobile Vet Service Spays Cats Cheaply

With her mobile vet clinic in tow, veterinarian Angie Ruppel is on a mission to reduce the feral cat population - at least in her corner of Northwest Wisconsin. Evidence of her work can be seen by cats with ear tips clipped off - her calling card that she has spayed/neutered them.

“The need is out there, and people want this service,” Ruppel says.

By being mobile and not having the overhead expenses of building ownership, her fees are affordable and she still makes a profit. For \$55 she spays/neuters and vaccinates outdoor cats for rabies and distemper. Fees for indoor cats are \$45 for males and \$65 for females with additional fees for vaccines. Typical clients are people who feed stray cats or farmers with lots of cats around who don’t want to pay higher fees at vet clinics.

A few key factors make Ruppel’s operation work. The DYIer started by gutting an old ice fishing trailer, insulating it and installing aluminum and stainless steel furnishings to transform it into a mobile clinic. Then she worked with area humane societies and others to book appointments (a minimum of

35 cats) and volunteers as helpers when she arrives.

Ruppel works for a veterinary clinic a couple of days a week and operates her Purple Cat business the rest of the time. She uses her trailer clinic about a third of the time, but many humane societies have set up rooms for her to work in.

“I’ve been a vet for 16 years and use the same surgery, same anesthesia, and same medication as in a regular vet clinic. I can do a 5-minute cat spay,” Ruppel says. With a helper she can accommodate up to 50 cats a day, and she estimates she has neutered about 3,000 cats since she started a year ago.

She takes her mobile clinic to farms and places where people live trap feral cats. For example, one customer grew up on a farm where there were lots of cats, and she recalls loving the kittens when they were born, then being heartbroken when they died because of disease and inbreeding. As an adult she hired Ruppel to neuter the cats on her parents’ farm to end the cycle. Another elderly client in a trailer court feeds stray cats, but couldn’t afford to have them neutered. Working with the Farm, Feral & Stray organization (www.

farmferalstray.org) and with donations and funding, Ruppel was able to spay/neuter them to prevent the cat population from expanding.

The veterinarian is licensed in Wisconsin and typically travels up to 2 hrs. from her Cumberland, Wis., home for her clinics.

She encourages other vets to offer similar services in their regions.

“My advice would be to get a day or two of training with vets who do high volume to make faster surgeries. That’s what I did, I just observed and practiced. Once the word is out, people want the service,” Ruppel says. And though the fees are lower, vets will earn extra income and do a valuable service at the same time.

Only in operation for a year, she says one local humane society reported that last year they had the lowest intake of cats in the last 5 years.

“I grew up a dog person, but have fallen in love with cats,” Ruppel says. She figures that one of the best ways she can care for them is by keeping the feral population under control.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Angie Ruppel (www.purplecatvet.com; afruppel@gmail.com).



Wisconsin veterinarian Angie Ruppel created her own mobile full-service clinic by gutting an old ice fishing trailer and installing furnishings.

