

“Cheese On Wheels” A Profitable New Farm Sideline

Instead of adding a new building, Alan and Emily Miller purchased a used “Cheese on Wheels” trailer when they decided to add cheese-making to their Minnesota dairy operation. Alan admits that it took plenty of trial and error to multiply the recipes he’d created from a home cheesemaking kit to 1,700-gal. batches. But within a couple of months he was selling Little Red Dairy cheese curds at farmers markets and local stores and restaurants.

There’s potential to make lots of cheese on their Theilman, Minn., dairy with 200 to 220 cows. And Miller’s focus on quality is attracting customer demand.

“My process is a little different in the way I do it. Our curds are softer and not as dry and hard as some curds you buy,” he says. He only keeps them on store shelves for two weeks to ensure freshness.

Miller makes 2 or 3 batches a week in the fully-equipped 53-ft. insulated trailer with a batch pasteurizer, vat, table, cheese press, walk-in cooler, utility room and compressors. Built by Darlington Dairy Supply Co. Inc. in Darlington, Wis., the

trailer was about a decade old, when the Millers purchased it from partners who ended their business. Miller had to make some repairs but estimates it was about a fourth the cost of putting up a building and buying the equipment. Like any production facility it was inspected and required to meet USDA standards.

Miller started with curds because they don’t require aging and provide a faster cash flow. He makes five types of curds: plain, ranch, garlic, dill and taco. He delivers weekly to stores and restaurants in a 60-mile radius. The Millers also sell at a couple of farmers markets and have supplied curds for local events.

“It’s blown up in a good way. You just have to get people to try them and they come back,” he says.

The inspiration for the name of the business, Little Red Dairy, comes from the couple’s toddler who has red hair. She is prominent in Facebook postings that feature Miller’s curds.

Soon he will be promoting block cheddar cheese that he has been aging.



Alan and Emily Miller bought this used trailer to add cheese-making to their dairy operation.

It all keeps him very busy, Miller admits, especially during the summer. He still has a dairy to run along with planting and harvesting. Haying time can be especially hectic. Miller sometimes starts the cheese-making process at 1 a.m. so curds are ready to package by 10 a.m. That gives him time to help his dad, Bill, put up hay and do other chores.

“It’s a couple of full-time jobs,” Miller notes, and only a small amount of milk is used for cheese right now.

“The game plan is to start out with a



They make 2 or 3 batches a week in the fully-equipped, 53-ft. insulated trailer.

trailer. If it fails, it’s easier to walk away from,” Alan Miller says. If it succeeds, the couple can expand with a building.

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“Gourd Corn” Dates Back To Founding Fathers

Virginia White Gourd Corn was grown by both Thomas Jefferson and George Washington on their farms. The large kernels with a dent on the back have been described as looking shriveled. The tapered, flattened white kernels are similar in appearance to gourd seeds.

“Gourd corn makes a nice cornmeal,” says Peggy Cornett of the Thomas Jefferson Foundation. “It’s definitely not a corn to eat off the cob unless it’s really young and tender.”

As curator of plants for the Foundation, Cornett oversees growth of this and many other varieties and species found at the farm and gardens of Monticello. Historical records indicate the Virginia White corn was planted at the plantation in 1810. George Washington is thought to have planted it in the 1760’s.

“We only grow about 35 plants in the

garden,” says Cornett. “We save back seed for ourselves and package a small amount of it for sale in the store.”

The corn is described as being 10 to 12 ft. tall with 1 or 2 ears per plant. Like the rest of the 2-acre gardens at Monticello, the corn receives compost and organic fertilizers as needed. Cornett notes that the corn hasn’t shown many problems with pests. The one exception is crows.

“We start the corn inside and then transplant seedlings,” says Cornett. “Otherwise, crows and others will take the seed.”

The Foundation bought its Virginia White Gourdseed corn seed from Southern Exposure Seed Exchange (SESE). Due to the limited amount of seed available at the plantation, Cornett suggests FARM SHOW readers contact SESE for seed (www.southernexposure.com; ph 540 894-9480).

Virginia White Gourdseed corn seed



Virginia White Gourd Corn has tapered, flattened white kernels that are dented on top. The corn grows 10 to 12 ft. tall.

harvested at Monticello is priced at \$3.95 for approximately 40 seeds in a packet. SESE prices its Virginia White Gourdseed corn at \$2.95 for 1 1/2 oz.



Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, The Monticello Shop, P.O. Box 318, Charlottesville, Va. 22902 (ph 800 243-1743; www.monticelloshop.org).

Leaf Blower Used To Clean Berries

Bernice Ingvaldson blows leaves and other trash from her large berry crop with what she calls her “Chute-N-Go” berry cleaner that consists of a simple plastic chute and a leaf blower.

Ingvaldson and her husband, Jim, maintain around 2,000 honeyberry bushes, also known as haskap berries (Vol. 42, No. 5). They pick 3/4 of them mechanically for commercial sale.

“We shake the bushes to harvest berries at a much faster rate than hand picking,” says Ingvaldson. “However, shaking drops a lot of leaves that need to be removed from the final product.”

Ingvaldson got the idea for her Chute-N-Go from a local man, Ethan Stinar. He and his family would roll blueberries down a blanket with a fan blowing away some of the debris. For haskaps, which have fragile skins, Stinar built a frame with 2 by 4’s and made a chute out of a 4 by 8-ft. sheet of slippery chloroplast used for plastic signs.

Air from a leaf blower is directed at the bottom of the chute. As buckets of berries are poured into the chute, the leaves are blown up and away.



The Ingvaldsons use a plastic chute and a leaf blower to remove leaves from their large berry crop. Air from leaf blower is directed at bottom of chute.

“The berries come out so clean that we can go directly from the Chute-N-Go to vacuum sealing,” says Ingvaldson.

Check out the video at farmshow.com to see the berry cleaner in action.

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