

If you're looking for new ways to add to your bottom line, take a look at the money-making ideas featured here and on the next page.

If you've found or heard about a new income-boosting idea, we'd like to hear about it. Send details to: FARM SHOW Magazine, P.O. Box 1029, Lakeville, Minn. 55044 (ph 800 834-9665) or email us at: editor@farmshow.com.

Gavin Spoor is a first generation farmer who has found success growing popcorn.



Popcorn Kickstarts Young Farmer's Career

First generation farmer Gavin Spoor kicked his farming operation into gear with popcorn sales. Having worked for area farmers while in high school, he rented 6 acres in 2017 while in college and planted soybeans. Faced with low commodity prices, he began looking for an alternative crop.

"In 2018, I planted 15 acres of popcorn," says Spoor. "I talked to a few popcorn farmers and watched some videos, but I didn't know how much I didn't know."

What he did learn was that he could sell his popcorn at a premium, once he learned how.

"When I wasn't in class, I would walk into grocery stores and ask what it took to sell

products in the store," recalls Spoor. "The managers shared information on barcodes, nutrition information needed, and tamper proof packaging, as well as what margin they needed."

Once he had popcorn to sell, he went back to the same stores and talked about what he would charge and how he would keep them stocked. Three years later, many of them are still in his core set of stores.

Spoor also got busy on the internet, posting videos from the field as the corn grew, from planting to harvest. With the help of a college roommate, he set up an online presence where people could order his popcorn. The social media presence worked and expanded his marketing footprint from local stores to a nationwide marketplace.

"Website sales have consistently climbed since I started," says Spoor. "Around Christmas 2020, I sold more in one day than I did the entire first year."

In the past 3 years, Spoor has sold popcorn to online customers in all 50 states. He has also educated them and others about corn in general and popcorn in particular. This summer one of his videos was posted on BuzzFeed News, a national internet news site.

"A lot of my online orders come from people who have seen one of my videos on Facebook, Instagram or TikTok," says Spoor. "A lot of people don't know the difference between regular corn, sweet corn and popcorn. It is fun to educate them and open them up to things they didn't realize existed."

Spoor has been through his own educational process. In 2018, his first crop suffered wind damage. As a result, he ended up harvesting

ears from stalks laying on the ground.

"I vacuum packed them as ears and sold them as a cool way for kids to see the cob the kernels grow on," recalls Spoor. "On-the-cob popcorn has ended up being one of my most popular products. Most of our popcorn is sold in bags and jars for retail and online sales but we also offer 50-lb. bags for bulk sale to kettle corn companies and concession stands."

He also learned about changing markets. In 2019 he increased to 40 acres of popcorn, but when COVID hit, his sales took a hit too. Excess production went to a local ethanol plant.

In 2020, he reduced his acres to 26 and watched sales take off. "I could have planted 40 to 50 acres," says Spoor.

Go to his online store and you can order 6 ears for \$11.95 or 28-ounce packages of either yellow or red popcorn for \$6.95. He also sells can koozies, T-shirts and hats.

"I once ran a special where I gave away free koozies with orders," says Spoor. "It was amazing how orders went up. Being creative with marketing really helps."

While popcorn prices have helped kickstart Spoor's farming career, conventional corn and soybeans haven't been overlooked. The aggressive young farmer has gone from those first 6 acres to more than 700 acres spread across 106 fields; small fields no one else wanted.

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Mobile Sandblasting Business Takes Off

Rob Foster made a bet on mobile Dustless Blasting, and it's paying off. Foster and his wife invested in a turnkey set up during the early days of the COVID 19 pandemic and went full time with it in March of this year. The system strips paint and debris from metal, masonry and wooden surfaces.

"We had a very good response and have been very busy," says Foster. "I do a lot of auto restoration, heavy equipment and reconditioning."

Foster had a steep learning curve. Normally he would have been trained at the headquarters of MMLJ, the company that sold the equipment. With COVID travel restrictions in place, he relied on video tutorials and personal experience.

An avid car restorer, he had a couple of older cars waiting to be worked on. "I experimented on one car," he says. "I stripped it down and put a coat of paint on it. I learned about air pressure, spraying distance, choice of media and nozzle patterns."

Foster estimates their investment at around \$100,000. For that, they got a trailer, 200-gal. water tank, 100-ft. hose, blasting pot, 75 hp. diesel engine and a 300-cu. ft. compressor. All they needed to add were different grades of crushed, recycled bottle glass and water.

"The beauty of the system is that fully loaded, I can work for 8 hrs.," says Foster.

The process is dustless because water is mixed with whatever media is used. The water vapor captures particles of paint, rust and media that otherwise would be released into the air. Instead, it all drops to the ground within a small area around the item being sand blasted.

"The environmental friendliness attracted me," says Foster. "It's also operator



Mobile dustless blasting has become a successful business for Rob Foster.

friendly. I don't have to worry about silica and resulting breathing issues."

While media mixed with water is a big selling point, Foster says the system can be used with any dry media, as well as for priming, painting and sealing services.

"I recently used soda to remove mold in a home," says Foster. "It's one of the best ways to remove mold. It gives good results and doesn't damage woodwork."

While Foster has been learning as he tries new things, his customers sometimes learn new things as well.

"One fellow had bought an old truck and thought it was in pretty good shape," says Foster. "When I started stripping the paint away, we discovered there wasn't a panel on the truck that hadn't been replaced or fixed. You can't hide the truth when you strip away the surface."

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Mobile Butcher Shops Help Boost Profits

Scott Dobrzynski and Marty Prem are eliminating the need to haul livestock to market by bringing the butcher shop right to the farm. The traveling "Natural Harvest" butchering service reduces stress on livestock - and on farmers.

Price-wise, establishing Natural Harvest was a steal. "The costs are a fraction of what a brick-and-mortar slaughterhouse is," says Prem. "Our current cost is approximately \$75,000 for the truck, compared to \$1.5 million when we were looking at building a facility to slaughter animals."

Prem Meats currently charges \$140 for a cow and \$80 for a pig with a processing cost of .64 hanging weight. The mobile unit is also used for buffalo, elk, and even yaks. After harvesting, the meat is transported back to the company's main facility to carry out the aging and processing.

Where this unit excels is in its versatility. No two farm harvest setups are the same, so the equipment inside Natural Harvest needs to be easily adaptable to different situations. "There is a whole new level of challenges that only mobile units have to deal with," says Prem. "It was difficult building a structure inside the truck that would withstand a heavy amount of weight and the movement while traveling down the road."

Cold temperatures are another challenge, as they can cause the plumbing and equipment to freeze if the unit isn't well insulated.

The butchering process is notorious for its bureaucratic red tape. Prem and Dobrzynski first started Natural Harvest with the intent of working only with animals that wouldn't be resold to avoid these complications. However, the strong interest in a mobile state-inspected slaughter service caused them to readjust their business model

Says Prem, "We worked countless hours



Prem Meats is a mobile butcher shop that can process at a lower cost without the need to transport livestock.

with our inspectors and supervisors to make the unit pass inspection. There was no guidance from the State other than what is written in the code, which applies to brick-and-mortar meat plants. We took what we knew about the requirements that were mandated for plants and made them work in our much smaller 26-ft. refrigerated box truck."

In this way, Natural Harvest offers customers in southwest Wisconsin a slaughter service that's convenient, affordable, and humane - all while delivering higher quality, better tasting meat from animals that ended their lives less stressfully than in traditional slaughterhouses.

What advice does Prem have for those considering a similar venture? "Communication between the farmers and state inspectors is key," he says. "And the people running the unit have to be creative and have a good working knowledge of mechanics."

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