

They'll Make Whiskey From Your Corn

Joe Knobbe offers crop farmers an opportunity to share part of their harvest. Send him corn - or other grains - and within a year it will be turned into barrel-aged whiskey at Knobbe's on-farm distillery, Flyover Whiskey.

The young Nebraska crop and beef farmer spent several years researching and experimenting with small batches before officially opening his business in 2020. With word of mouth and social media, customers from throughout the Midwest are learning of his unusual venture.

The process is simple. Place an order on the Flyover Whiskey website and a Tyvek bag will be mailed to you. Fill it with corn (about half of a 5-gal. bucket) and ship it back with the prepaid label.

He and Devon Bircherm, head distiller, make a corn mash and run it through one of their small stills.

"All our equipment is set up for six (750 mL) bottle batches. We are very small scale," Knobbe says. "We don't chill filter it, which we think helps with the flavor." The clear liquid is aged in a 5-liter oak barrel for 6 to 8 mos., which gives it color. If requested it can be aged for as little as a month.

"Customers say it's different because it's not aged a long time. They are really surprised that it's so smooth," he adds, noting that each color and variety of corn has subtle differences.

A customized label by graphic artist Kylie Kai adds the finishing touch to make the whiskey personal to share with friends or enjoy on special occasions.

"Farmers have a lot of pride in what they grow," Knobbe says, and the labels



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reflect that.

In addition to making corn whiskey, Flyover Whiskey experiments with other grains and blends. For example, they combined 80 percent Nebraska corn with 20 percent Montana wheat to make whiskey for a couple's wedding.

The cost for six bottles is \$350 for farmers who provide corn. Customers without grain can order whiskey for \$375, made with corn from other farmers or a blend from Flyover Whiskey.

The whiskey can be shipped to Nebraska and North Dakota, and Flyover Whiskey is working on shipping to other corn-growing states.

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He Breeds Goats To Eat Cedar

A select line of goats in Texas may not love cedar, but they do like to eat it more than other goats do. Professor John Walker, range specialist, Texas A&M, has been developing goats with a preference for cedar over the past 15 years. One of the reasons for the study is that Eastern Red Cedar is an invasive species that now covers an estimated 50 million acres in Texas alone. It's found in all 50 states.

"I used to raise stock dogs and thought if blue heelers and border collies could be bred to go at different ends of animals, why couldn't we breed goats to eat different vegetation?" says Walker. "We started out identifying which goats in our herd ate the most cedar."

Walker ran fecal samples through Near Infrared (NIR) spectroscopy calibrated for cedar. Instead of selecting for weight gain or weaning weight, he selected for cedar consumption.

"We identified high-consuming and low-consuming goats and started breeding within these groups to reduce the amount of cedar the low consumers ate and increase the amount of cedar the high consumers ate," says Walker. "The high consumers that we call Aggie Cedar Eater (ACE) goats were eating two to three times the cedar as the low consumers."

Walker's goal was to see if the preference was due to genetics. He genotyped all the goats and identified markers that were different between the two groups. The goats were all Spanish/Boer crossbreds common to Texas.

"We found seven markers that were different," says Walker. "We're still working on what they mean."

One possibility is that ACE goats are better able to deal with the tannin and terpene compounds found in cedar. These compounds make cattle and sheep averse to eating it.

Walker also evaluated the importance of the biome in cedar consumption. He split both flocks and exposed half of each group to cedar. The other halves were pastured in cedar-free areas. Kids from all four groups were weaned in a cedar-free lot for a month



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before being turned into an area with lots of cedar.

He found that exposure as kids did have an impact. Cedar was 30 percent of the diet of kids from the ACE group raised on cedar versus 20 percent of the diet of those raised without cedar. However, even the ACE goats raised without cedar exposure ate twice as much cedar as the low-consuming group.

"Regardless of where they were raised, cedar comprised about 8 to 10 percent of the diet of the low-consuming goats," says Walker. "The difference in the ACE groups may have been partly their microbiome or learned behavior. However, the study indicated that genetics had a lot of impact."

"If goats are eating more cedar, they are not eating as much other vegetation," says Walker. "A producer with ACE-type goats should be able to run more goats if cedar is present."

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Bushel Boy farms grows tomatoes, strawberries and cucumbers in its indoor greenhouses year round.



Growing Market Vegetables Indoors

Shoppers in the Midwest can buy fresh, locally picked cucumbers and tomatoes year-round from Bushel Boy Farms.

"They fully ripen on the vine. What is picked today is in stores tomorrow," says Chuck Tryon, president of Bushel Boy Farms. With 32 acres of high-tech glass greenhouses, the Owatonna, Minn., based business transports truckloads of tomatoes, cucumbers and strawberries to stores around the Twin Cities and adjacent states. Another 17 acres of greenhouses in Mason City, Iowa, deliver tomatoes in that region.

Entrepreneur Jay Johnson started the business in 1990 with one greenhouse to grow tomatoes year-round. With technology that controls the climate, uses CO2 off the boilers, and recycles water to optimize nutrients for good flavor, the greenhouse operation expanded and grows vine-on tomatoes, beefsteak tomatoes, and grape and cherry tomato varieties.

A couple of acres of strawberries are in their third season, producing berries about

10 mos. out of the year when berries aren't available in local fields.

An acre of cucumbers was planted in late 2022 as a trial in one of the greenhouses. It's been very successful, Tryon says, producing long English and mini (4-in.) cucumbers. To meet the demand for snack items, Bushel Boy Farms plans to add baby cucumber varieties in the coming months.

Bushel Boy uses bees for pollination in all the greenhouses and reuses and saves water and other resources as much as possible. In Iowa, snow melt and rainwater are captured for irrigating plants.

"We're spending a lot of time looking at additional ways that technology can provide us with advantages," Tryon says. In the future, that may include robotics for labor and using cameras to monitor the plants.

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Activities at the Knollbrook Farm include a corn maze with over 5 miles of paths in a 12 acre field.

Family-Friendly Fall Activities Pay Off

Each fall Knollbrook Farm in Goshen, Ind., offers outdoor activities for visitors of all ages. The family dairy farm grows corn, soybeans, and alfalfa hay but has made a name for itself with zany activities, including a pumpkin slingshot, jump pad, petting zoo, corn maze, Super Mega Slide, cow train ride, and more.

Owners John and Cynthia Adam are first-generation dairy farmers. While they started their dairy operation with 13 cows in 1998, they now manage a herd of 130. These days the entire family gets involved with farm work, including the Adam's five children.

Every fall, Knollbrook Farm opens up to the public for opportunities for education and play. The farm's famous corn maze contains

more than five miles of pathways within a 12-acre field. Within it are 12 posts that contain clues for a mystery maze, the theme of which changes year to year. Past themes have included the Revolutionary War and Bible trivia. The maze itself is geared for all ages and includes plenty of exits around the perimeter in case little ones need a break.

Another highlight is a 50-ft. Super Mega Slide, a ride where kids can reach speeds of 20 miles per hour sliding down on inner tubes.

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