

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](mailto:editor@farmshow.com).

During the 4 to 6-week harvest in mid-September, workers pick up every chestnut every day to prevent disease. The chestnuts are placed in water and all the floaters are removed and fed to hogs.



## They Grow Chestnuts In Kansas

"Chestnuts roasting on an open fire" doesn't immediately bring the image of Kansas to mind. But Chestnut Charlie's in Lawrence, Kan., might change that while educating consumers about the seasonal nut.

Charlie NovoGradac and his wife, Debbie Milks, along with dozens of helpers, harvested 30,000 lbs. of chestnuts from about 13 acres of trees in 2021. Their venture began in 1995 when NovoGradac decided he wanted to grow an organic crop on their property. Since his father was retiring from growing Christmas trees, NovoGradac planted 1,000 evergreens and planted chestnut trees between every third tree.

"It took 12 years for them to begin to produce nuts - and they grew on us," he says, adding that they also experimented with black walnut, pecan and hazelnut trees.

Freezing temperatures are not ideal for growing chestnuts but Chinese chestnut varieties are hardier than European/Japanese varieties grown in other parts of the country.

"Customers say they like the Chinese varieties better because it's easier to peel off the bitter skin," Milks says.

Also, because chestnuts are not common in Kansas, the couple hasn't had issues with diseases or insects such as the weevils that infest pecans. That's made it easier to use organic practices - nitrogen-fixing cover crops, mulching and constantly pruning brush trees like mulberry, wild grape and elm that grow close to the chestnut trees.

During the 4 to 6-week harvest starting in mid-Sept., workers pick up every chestnut every day to keep disease from starting. The chestnuts are placed in water and all the floaters are removed and fed to hogs. The rest move on to an inspection belt where they are sorted and sized before being bagged and put in a cooler.

Chestnuts don't keep like other nuts, NovoGradac emphasizes. They must be refrigerated and only keep a month or two. "Chestnuts become sweeter with a little bit of drying because their starch converts to sugar," he explains. "Chestnuts should be

consumed while still plump and firm to the touch. They can be peeled by roasting, boiling or microwaving."

To roast, chestnuts are first scored with a knife, so they don't explode. They can be baked in a 375-degree oven or heated on the stove or an open fire. The shell and thin skin inside are peeled off the warm chestnuts and they're ready to eat. Or the kernels can be frozen in plastic bags for later use.

Flavors vary between the varieties, Milks says, and customers describe the flavors differently, from squash to potato to mushroom. The texture is mealy, and chestnuts can be used in soups, stuffing and other recipes. Nutritionally, they have fewer calories and lower fat compared to other nuts. They're high in antioxidants and fiber and have nutrients beneficial for heart and digestive health as well as blood sugar control.

Marketing them was challenging initially. The couple roasted chestnuts to sell along with Christmas trees, but they only had two sales. They sold roasted chestnuts at events, but people didn't want to purchase them to roast themselves. After they held a farm tour that included many Chinese Americans and someone posted about them on a food blog, Chestnut Charlie's grew in popularity.

The couple sells out every year through retail sales including U-pick, farmer's markets, and online (\$5 to \$7/lb. depending on size) and wholesale to natural food stores and other markets.

"We get a lot of requests from people interested in starting chestnut orchards," Milks says. Growing chestnut trees is profitable, but she notes there are challenges. Though they don't blossom until June, late freezes that damage leaves can kill the season's crop. A walk-in cooler is required and enough labor to harvest daily is important. It can also take 8 to 12 years for trees to provide a good harvest.

Contact FARM SHOW Followup, Chestnut Charlie's, Box 1166, Lawrence, Kansas 66044 (ph 785-841-8505; [chestnutcharlie@gmail.com](mailto:chestnutcharlie@gmail.com); [www.chestnutcharlie.com](http://www.chestnutcharlie.com); [www.chestnutgrowers.org](http://www.chestnutgrowers.org)).



J.D. Russell Hay & Straw specializes in racetrack-quality hay and straw square bales they ship nationwide.

## Hay Operation Specializes In Small Square Bales

By Lydia Noyes, Contributing Editor

J.D. Russell Hay & Straw, Inc. produces two-tie small square bales of alfalfa-orchardgrass hay and straw on over 1,000 acres in northwestern Ohio (Vol. 45, No. 5). There is a robust market for them, especially among horse owners. As such, the farm specializes in racetrack-quality hay and straw, which they ship nationwide.

The Russells got a slow start in the hay business. Neither John nor his wife, Denise, are from farming families, but they started raising hay in the 1980's when John's employer needed some for his cattle. They began with about \$500 in equipment and managed only a few acres, but slowly scaled up the operation over the next two decades.

Today, this family-run farm produces about 200,000 bales of hay and straw each year. All seven of the Russell's children have been involved in some capacity, with several planning to take a more active role in the business long-term.

Over a typical summer, J.D. Russell Hay & Straw's fields are harvested four times. Each field is cut with two New Holland self-propelled mowers with Circle C conditioners. Once the grass reaches the ideal moisture level, it's baled into uniform 60-lb. bales, which are stored in various hay sheds on the property.

Russell has tinkered with a self-propelled hay fluffer/tedder to improve drying rates. He's also continuously striving to improve baling efficiency with his small square bale equipment - a constant challenge

when managing equipment that has been commercially ignored for close to 30 years.

The farm also emphasizes soil health. All fields are limed to keep the fields around 6.8 pH, and fertilizer is applied at a rate of 100 pounds of 6-15-40 per ton of hay removed. For the grass mix, the farm aims for a 50:50 mix of alfalfa and orchardgrass. That requires approximately twelve pounds of coated alfalfa seed and eight pounds of orchardgrass seed per acre.

J.D. Russell Hay & Straw, Inc. stands out for its shipping strategy. The farm can fit 777 bales in a 53-ft. van trailer - 111 more than most of their competitors. By creating smaller, denser bales that reach the same weight as standard sizes, it's possible to use every cubic inch of trailer space for more tons per load, all at the same freight rate. Paired with customized JCB telehandlers that make it possible to rotate a tier of 21 bales in any direction, the farm can load a full trailer in just 45 min. Even the property itself has been designed with large trucks in mind, offering ample room for making tricky maneuvers.

The farm's customers tend to be feed retailers and racetrack trainers, as well as an equestrian college. J.D. Russell Hay & Straw, Inc. only sells hay by the semi-load.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, J.D. Russell Hay & Straw, Inc. 7187 Devils Hole Road, Pemberville, Ohio 43450 (ph 419-466-7945; [www.jdrussellhay.com](http://www.jdrussellhay.com)).

## She Customizes Metal Stirrups With Engraving

You can personalize metal stirrups with a custom engraving by Jennifer Turner, owner of Crafted Simply, Inc.

The Colorado entrepreneur engraved her first stirrups for a father who wanted to give his son's wrestling coach a special gift. Her customized creations are perfect for saddle club members or competitors to record their wins at barrel racing, bulldogging and other equine events.

Turner and her sister, Valerie, learned to use tools from their husbands and first started making wooden photo collage frames, which led to making wooden signs. Turner's fascination with laser engravers resulted in buying a small one and then a larger one.

"It can engrave various items up to 40 in. wide and 24 in. tall, and the table raises and lowers so I can engrave a car hood or door, glass, metal - the sky's the limit," she says. She can also engrave the wooden signs instead of painting them.

Besides engraving for decorative purposes such as a whiskey decanter set and cutting boards, she's engraved dual-colored cattle ear tags. She is open to other challenges to



Laser engraved stirrups are perfect for saddle club members or competitors to record their wins at barrel racing, bulldogging and other equine events.

broaden the market of items she can make with her laser.

Items such as the stirrups help her business stand out on Etsy. Cost varies according to each design, but engraved stirrups start at around \$55/pair, plus the cost of the stirrups and shipping.

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