Sheard watches as students work.

'Meatsmith' Teaches Livestock Harvesting

Brandon Sheard may have studied Shakespeare in graduate school, but his specialty today is traditional livestock harvesting. He and his wife Lauren raise livestock on their Oklahoma homestead and slaughter, butcher and process the meat for their family and for sale. They also teach others to do the same. For 14 years, Farmstead Meatsmith has provided an in-depth understanding of all things meat, including preparing it in the kitchen. Sheard's YouTube channel has over 40,000 subscribers and hundreds of thousands of views. Other social media outlets also highlight Sheard's work.

"I worked for a multi-species small farm in the Pacific Northwest and had the opportunity to get into the pre-industrial tradition of how animals were harvested, cut up and prepared," says Sheard. "If you go back to that period, the scale is smaller, more manageable and artful. The home cook was doing it all, from slaughter to end-use. Every part of the carcass was used."

When Sheard and his wife moved to a homestead in eastern Oklahoma, they started sharing what they had learned. Multi-day, hands-on classes with eight students or less cover the slaughter of two steers, hogs or lambs and end with a meal featuring its meat. Students carry out all aspects of butchering and processing, but it all starts with the kill.

"All livestock react to stress," says Sheard. "If you deprive that, they aren't afraid and stay calm. We teach how to prevent stress in the animal at the moment of its death. We show specifically how to do it in a way that works on a small scale without a lot of pens and chutes."

Sheard recognizes he could have larger classes if he simply demonstrated techniques. However, his goal is for students to be ready to repeat the processes learned at their own farmstead or those of others.

"We have alumni who do custom slaughter in their home areas," says Sheard. "I warn students that if people in their area learn about the classes, they'll be demanding their services."

The Meatsmith program has evolved over time. Today, it includes a members-only community of around 400 people, many of whom have taken in-person classes. Members pay a $29.99 signup fee and a monthly $17.49 fee to access more than 50 online films and a monthly live cast, where they connect and share information.

Nonmembers can get a feel for Sheard and Meatsmith classes by viewing more than 260 free videos online. Subjects include humane harvesting of several meat animal species, processing and cookery. The Farmstead Meatsmith website online store includes a series of short digital downloads on everything from tools, preparing stock and soap to making lard, meat cookery and more.

Sheard does custom slaughter and butchering within about two hours of his home. He also offers phone or video consultations in late spring and early summer.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Farmstead Meatsmith (Community@farmsteadmeatsmith.com; https://farmsteadmeatsmith.com; Instagram: @farmsteadmeatsmith; YouTube: @TheFarmsteadMeatsmith).

Nearly finished floating fish tank with outriggers.

Farming Fish In A Floating Tank

A fishless trip to the family farm pond inspired Jim Frey to raise fish to stock the pond. Half a century later, his hobby has evolved into a fish hatchery, custom pond stocking, design and construction of pond aeration systems, and custom dock building and installation. Along the way, Frey invented a floating fish tank for farm ponds and old quarry ponds.

When Jim died in late 2023, his son Russell and daughter-in-law Dawn took over the business. "The fish hatchery was Dad's passion, and the floating fish tank was 100 percent his deal," says Russell. "He started with a 5-gal. bucket for his first prototype. Then he went to a lick tank. Finally, he went to the big tank."

Frey's concept was a tank that could float in a larger body of water. It would contain the growing fish while maintaining fresh water. When starting a batch of fish, he could open a valve, and the tank would sink to a target depth. Harvesting the fish would be expedited by opening another valve and letting the tank rise to the surface.

"We had been renting a 5-acre, 36-ft. deep quarry pond for 26 years and using hanging net pens in the deepest part," says Russell. "He installed the tank there."

Frey's floating tank started as an above-ground, 7,500-gal. fish tank in an indoor fish farm. It had a 16-ft. dia. with a height of 5 ft.

When that aquaculture business closed, Frey bought several tanks at $3,000 each. He modified one of the tanks with the help of a $9,000 grant from the North Central Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) Projects. His final SARE research report outlined his plans and progress before his death.

The tank was wrapped in blocks of Styrofoam for flotation and set on a treated wood base. After floating it in the quarry pond, he poured a concrete floor at the bottom with a 1/2-in. slope to a center drain. The concrete and epoxy on the tank seams sealed it from possible leaks.

A 6-in. drainpipe with an exterior standpipe maintains the tank's water level. Four 4-in. airlift pumps create circulation and aeration in the tank, completing a water exchange every 27 min.

Frey added a wood framework for sunscreen over the tank. He also added outriggers around the tank to stabilize and support an eventual walkway around the tank.

During assembly, Frey learned his lease on the quarry pond would not be renewed, and he had to move the partially completed tank back to his farm. Once there, he set it up next to one of his farm ponds to evaluate water usage and circulation. However, it never again floated.

The Frey fish grow to a good size for farm pond fish. Over the past 50 years, the Freys have selected male bluegills to breed with selected female green sunfish. Some of the males weigh as much as 2 1/4 lbs. each. They also raise, sell and stock trout, crappies, catfish, bass, walleye, perch, muskie and more.

"We mainly stock private waters, ponds and lakes, often around housing developments," says Russell. "Most of our business is in the tri-state area of Iowa, Minnesota and Wisconsin."

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Jim Frey Fish Hatchery, 403 W. Bradford St., West Union, Iowa 52175 (ph 563-422-3368; jimfreyfish@gmail.com; www.jimfreyfishhatchery.com; https://projects.sare.org/project-reports/fnc19-1163/).

Cattle Tech Idea Wins Startup Competition

Canada's Farm Show in Regina, Sask., features a Cultivator Powered by Conexus Credit Union event that brings together young entrepreneurs and agricultural producers.

The event, known as the 24-Hour Agtech Startup, challenged participants to turn their innovative ideas into practical farm and ranch solutions within a single day. A "Minimum Viable Product" on-stage pitch presentation followed in the hopes of securing seed money from Conexus Credit Union.

The teams choose a desirable problem and, over 24 hours, work to address the challenge.

Agricultural mentors, experts and researchers are on hand to assist teams as they build applications and interfaces.

After 24 hours, team pitches were presented and judged by a panel of experts. The "People's Choice Award" title and $1,000 were won by the "Scan My Herd" team.

The Scan My Herd innovation leverages cattle RFID tag data to correlate essential health management information, including vaccinations and injuries.

The five-member 24-Hour Startup team included Jonathan Vargas, Logan Fossenier, Sathyajit Loganathan, Noah Stasuik and Glenn Raphael Garcia De Los Reyes. Each brought various skills to the table.

Fossenier brought limited agricultural knowledge to the event, only occasionally having helped on his grandfather's cattle ranch.

"I based the concept for Scan My Herd on my grandpa's ranch," he says. "I felt if we had a newer version of RFID tags which were similarly priced, the ranchers could use their phones to connect the cattle to the database right at the chutes. This would allow them to track their animal's history to make more informed buying and selling decisions."

He says the idea was to build an application that provided aspects like feed, inventories and health. The underlying technology would be a new way of storing the same identifying tags and the government database, plus placing some information directly on the tags.

"I was pleased with our team and how the event went," Fossenier says. "What we came up with technically was quite impressive. I plan on going again next year and will tell all my coding friends about it."

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Cultivator Powered by Conexus, Agtech Accelerator, Suite 2-2375 College Ave., Regina, Sask., Canada S4P 0S8 (media@conexus.ca; www.cultivator.ca).

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