### Money-Making Ideas To Boost Farm Income

# Vermont Farm Family Raises Fallow Deer

Hank Dimuzio and his wife Rhonda Roberts say raising fallow deer has been an excellent side business to utilize the woodland, pastureland, and cropland on their historic Middlebury, Vt., farm. An 8-ft. tall fence encloses about 100 acres where 600 fallow deer graze, raise their young, and grow. The couple markets the meat from about 100 to 120 animals a year directly to consumers, grocery stores, and restaurants. Dimuzio says venison is a high-dollar protein, and he adjusts his prices regularly to suit market demand, with an eye on his bottom line.

Dimuzio and Roberts weren't raised on a farm, but he and his wife decided in 1991, when he was an emergency room (ER) doctor, that they wanted to live on the land. "I guess that working in our family's 3/4acre garden when I was young had a lasting effect on me," he says. Soon, Dimuzio and Roberts bought a historic dairy farm and named it LedgEnd, after the bedrock edge of limestone that ends on the farm.

In 1995, they began raising fallow deer, choosing the animals because they didn't require much daily care, which fit Dimuzio's ER work schedule. "Milking



Mature fallow deer bucks have large palmate antlers similar to moose.

and higher care animals like goats were out of the question, and we do like deer, so that's the route we went," he says.

Fallow deer, native to Europe and Mesopotamia, are smaller than whitetails. Their coats

vary from light rust with fawn-like spots to deep burgundy. The male's antlers are broad, flat, and palmate, similar to their distant moose cousins. Females produce one fawn a year. They're typically disease-resistant and not susceptible to chronic wasting disease like the whitetail population.

Dimuzio and Roberts raise their deer in pastures and feed them hay and protein during winter months. Protein pellets have the added benefit of enticing deer to move into different pastures or the yard for sorting and culling. Dimuzio culls mature does from the herd when they're no longer producing fawns. They yield 45 to 50 lbs. of meat. He markets the bucks at 2 1/2 to 3 1/2 years old. They produce 70 to 90 lbs. of meat. They market the fine-grained, tender, and flavorful cuts directly to individual customers, grocery stores, and restaurants.

Dimuzio savs fallow deer are naturally curious and generally easy to raise, except for young males. "They're skittish and dangerous to be around because of their sharp spike-like antlers. They can easily side kick 4 to 5 ft. high when they're nervous."

LedgEnd's handling facility has lanes next to a building and outside walls nearly 10 ft.

tall to protect the deer and handlers. By Vermont law, antlers on male deer going to market must be removed, which is a quick and painless process because the antlers have hardened off. Deer are then kept in a pen and calmed in the barn for a few weeks before being loaded into a trailer for the processing plant. There, the meat is cut, vacuum packaged, and labeled. The processor makes LedgEnd's all-venison sausage and keeps the hides as partial payment for their work.

Dimuzio says the fallow deer business has its challenges, including annual fence inspections, hungry bald eagles that can capture 8 to 10-lb. spring fawns, and a shortage of large animal veterinarians knowledgeable in wild animals. High processing costs and inspection fees are also a factor, along with fickle consumers. Despite these concerns, Dimuzio and Roberts say they enjoy caring for their amazing animals and providing people with local, high-quality meat.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, LedgEnd Farm, 1288 Munger St., Middlebury, Vt. 05753 (www. Ledgendfarm.com).

the beans cleaner," says Foreman. "I fill a 5-gal. bucket and thresh them using a threaded rod with a propeller-type attachment at its end. As it spins around in the bucket, it splits open the pods without

She winnows them by pouring them into a box in front of a box fan. It blows away the lighter dry pods, and the heavier beans fall into a box.

Foreman has moved from wheel hoes to laying tarps between the rows for weed control. It has eliminated a lot of work, and she feels the bean plants are taller and stronger with more pods.

When Foreman started marketing her heirloom beans, pricing was a challenge. A veteran farmer advised her to charge a premium. She recognizes that marketing to customers in a large metropolitan area gives her an advantage.

"My average price for beans is \$9 per pound, but my market is accustomed to higher prices," says Foreman. "Those prices might not fly in another market."

While she wouldn't turn away new business, she does warn that existing customers are satisfied first. "I have loyal customers, some of whom have become friends, and between them and my farmers market customers, they take whatever I have," savs Foreman.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Encore Farm. Paula Foreman (encorebeans@ gmail.com; www.encore-farm.com).

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## Heirloom Bean Biz **Thrives On Just One Acre**

Paula Foreman is a one-woman heirloom bean business. She's hands-on, from planting, weeding, harvesting, and processing to marketing directly to her customers. It's not a big business, but one she says has a big return in satisfying customers.

"I have a core of incredibly faithful customers, and they come first," says Foreman. "I rotate through a stable of bean varieties that are customer favorites, but every year, I experiment with something new."

What Foreman looks for in a new bean variety is taste and texture. "Beans can be about flavor, it's a non-starter," she says, "If it doesn't taste good, why bother."

She compares her freshly harvested beans to supermarket offerings. "You don't know forever to cook and have a mealy texture. Mine are soft and creamy."

I try something new, I like small seed houses

beautiful, but if the description says nothing

how old they are," she says. "They can take

Foreman prefers to buy seeds from small suppliers like Uprising Seeds, Adaptive Seeds, and Victory Seeds (Vol. 41, No. 2). "I save my own seeds for replanting, but when

run by a handful of people," she says. They're do-it-yourself and hands-on.'

She appreciates that her regular customers are willing to try new things. The same factor plays a role in the farmers market where she

Nearly 20 years ago, Foreman took a chance and left her career to volunteer on a CSA farm, earning a weekly share of produce for her efforts. After 3 years, she decided to try market gardening for herself.

"I had no money, no land, and no experience, just a desire," says Foreman. "When I came across heirloom dry beans in a Seed Savers Exchange catalog, I knew that was it."

The CSA gave her access to 1/3 of an acre. The first crop was a learning experience. The second year went better. At the time, she was working as a baker in a restaurant noted for a chef/owner willing to experiment.

'When I told her what I was growing, she said she would buy everything I harvested," says Foreman.

As her co-workers went on to other restaurants, her customer list grew. Her plot size also grew to a full acre, one of three she leases, allowing her to rotate beans to fresh

Now in her 15th year on the leased land, 90 percent of her customer base has transitioned from restaurants to individual and farmers market customers. At harvest, she emails past customers about that year's varieties.

So far, the largest crop on her acre has been 400 lbs. of saleable beans. She plants, cultivates, and harvests by hand, picking individual pods. "Harvesting by pods keeps

### **Car Tool Ideas Wanted**

Lisle Corporation is looking for new tools they can make and offer their customers. The automotive tool maker welcomes ideas and works with inventors to get patents and shares the profits. Currently, the company pays royalties to more than 115 individuals.

"Our idea program has been in place for more than 50 years," says Kevin Tally, Lisle Corporation. "Individuals can submit ideas to us related to our product line. A pretty good number have become tools. If we feel it'll be accepted, we work with the person to develop the product and pay them an award based on sales of the product."

The company website displays several products that have been developed through the Idea Program. One recent addition to the Lisle product line that came through the program is the Electrical Disconnect Plier. Tally says it was submitted a few years ago, but took time to get into production.

"We make most of our own tools, but our cost of manufacture for it was too high, and we had to go overseas," says Tally. "The inventor said it would sell, and we've had trouble keeping it on the shelf."



Electrical disconnect pliers.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Lisle Corporation, P.O. Box 89, Clarinda, Iowa 51632 (ph 712-542-5101; www.lislecorp. com/idea-program).

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