

## Colorado Farmer Can't Stop Trying New Things

Roy Pfaltzgraff just can't stop innovating on his northeastern Colorado dryland farm. In an area where it can be hard to grow a good crop of wheat, he drills sunflowers, corn and as many as eight other crops on 12-in. centers (Vol. 47, No. 4). Next year, he plans to experiment with 3-in. centers on cereal grains and edible beans.

"I took an old air drill and replaced all the ground drives with hydraulic drives, so I can turn the meters on and off as we go through the field," says Pfaltzgraff. "A grant from Zero Footprint, a nonprofit that's encouraging regenerative farming, helped me upgrade to a new seed cart with hydraulic drives. For a toolbar, I'm going to use an old hoe drill with openers on 6-in. spacing and a neighbor's disc openers in between. Combining them will give me the option of drilling on 3-in. centers or drilling one crop on 6-in. spacing and a second crop like clover in between."



From rice to mushrooms, Roy Pfaltzgraff has many innovations in the works on his farm.

### Dryland Rice In Colorado

Pfaltzgraff is looking to add rice to his current list. Last year, he planted too late, and an early fall frost took it. This year, he planted a few weeks earlier.

"It's amazing how well the rice is doing," he told FARM SHOW in early June.

### Pollinator Strips

When Colorado Parks and Wildlife offered to rent his headlands for \$100 an acre and seed them down to wildflowers, Pfaltzgraff signed on. The results are so positive that he would gladly renew the five-year contract when it expires, or even keep them without the rent.

"I don't have to worry about compaction reducing yields, and I can park semis on them at harvest," says Pfaltzgraff. "We have honeybee hives and sell the honey. This was the first spring we hardly needed to feed sugar water. They had early flowers to work on. Plus, last summer we had grasshoppers, but most of them stayed in the pollinator strips where they were attacked by praying mantises flying in."

### On-Farm Milling

For the past seven years, Pfaltzgraff has marketed part of his crops through an on-farm milling operation, Haxtun Heritage Mills. He produces and markets five baking mixes through regional stores and online.

This year, he upgraded with an Ostiroler mill from Austria. "It has multiple integrated sifters and a bagger," says Pfaltzgraff. "We can produce any percentage of whole grain flour. With corn, we can get flour, meal and grits in a single pass."

### Flux Towers

Pfaltzgraff is working with Jerry Hatfield (a retired USDA soils researcher) to evaluate gas exchange between soil and vegetative matter using flux towers. Sustainable Oils, the camelina company, wants to determine the carbon footprint of different crops. The flux towers measure light and what's outgassed in terms of CO<sub>2</sub>, methane and water vapor. The carbon footprint determines the premium paid by California refineries for camelina oil.

### Mushrooms In Shipping Containers

To create a weather-neutral enterprise for the farm, Pfaltzgraff is modifying a shipping container to use as a mushroom growing chamber. He plans to use the mushroom substrate on his fields.

### Hybrid Competitive OP Corn

Pfaltzgraff is in his second year of planting MN 13, a depression era, open-pollinated corn variety. He's saving the seed. Last year, it yielded as well as his worst conventional hybrid. "I expect yields to improve as it adapts to my system and area," he says.

### Spreading The Word

In recent years, Pfaltzgraff has become popular as a speaker at regional and national farmer meetings. In response to requests, he initially developed a workbook on finding new markets for farm crops. More recently, he introduced Seeding Circles, an eight-week online course with a handful of farmers in a virtual meeting. In June, he hosted a field day for farmers and others interested in his practices.

"The field day included researchers who are working on various projects on the farm," says Pfaltzgraff.

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## Laser Engraver Ideal For Home Projects

SainSmart's Genmitsu Kiosk laser engraver is a portable home engraver featuring a workspace of approximately 4 in. by 4 in. It's ideal for hobbyists or small business owners.

"The Genmitsu Kiosk is newcomer-friendly. It's great for someone who would like to make a small DIY business at home or in a small studio," says Jamie from SainSmart support. "It's handy on farms and ranches. We highly recommend it for marking the nameplates or numberplates of animals or crops."

The Kiosk's removable base plate offers flexibility for larger projects, and its pre-assembled frame ensures it's ready to use out of the box.

"We're currently at the forefront in the category of home laser machines," says Jamie. "Compared to other brands' laser machines, our prices are quite favorable. Our machines are easy to operate, simple and beautiful to look at, and have built-in safety features. Not only is the outside of the machine protected by lightproof acrylic, but it includes a safety shield."



Fruit products are mainly fresh, conventionally and organically grown fruit, although they also deliver some vegetables, plus dry fruit and nut snacks.

## Company Markets And Sells Fruit Boxes

FruitGuys was started in the San Francisco Bay Area 27 years ago by Chris Mittelstaedt, who saw an opportunity to bring healthier food to offices. The family-owned and Certified B Corp company has since expanded, currently shipping fruit boxes from 11 locations to between 6,000 and 7,000 sites across the U.S.

"Donations and volunteering are a large part of the FruitGuys' mission," says CEO Erin Mittelstaedt. "We want to give back, so 20% of our profits go to relieving hunger. By donating food to those in need and preventing waste, we also help divert greenhouse gas emissions (422 tons diverted in 2024)."

All excess produce and snacks are donated, reducing waste while increasing access to healthy food for those in need.

Since its inception, the company has been committed to small family farms. They believe farmers deserve support and celebration, so FruitGuys try to buy directly from local farms and tell their story.

Fruit products are mainly fresh, conventionally and organically grown fruit, although they also deliver some vegetables, plus dry fruit and nut snacks. Many of their snacks are sourced from brands that prioritize sustainability, use eco-friendly practices, and/or support environmental nonprofits.

"We support sustainable agriculture and growing practices, plus recognize farms that don't get certified because they're not growing organically because of the cost," Mittelstaedt says. "We believe in celebrating all these farms. Plus, local sourcing means lower transportation emissions."

The business is two-tiered, with most of its fruit boxes being delivered to company

offices and break rooms for employees. Most of the remainder go to schools.

"We try to buy the best of the season, hand-selecting our items so each client gets a mixed box of the highest quality fruit," Mittelstaedt says. "Bananas are popular, which of course aren't local, but then we try to mix it up and buy the season's best for everything else, including citrus, oranges, apples and pears. In summer, we have more stone fruit like peaches, nectarines and plums. People are open to trying new things, so we have fun sharing unique items with our clients."

In addition to delivering fruit boxes, FruitGuys offers nutritional education, tasting events, and farmers markets to provide methods of employee engagement for their clients. Its FruitGuys Community Fund awards grants to small farms every year, specifically for sustainability projects like solar-powered equipment, expanding pollinator habitats and revitalizing soil. The company supported 20 farms with a total of \$85,328 in grants in 2024. Since 2012, FruitGuys has awarded 164 grants totaling \$665,000 to small-scale farmers.

Mittelstaedt explains that Covid hit the company hard, as they lost about 90% of their business, but they've rebounded since then, seeing companies and hybrid workers coming back. FruitGuys fed 906,972 people in 2024. She estimates they've served 600,000 allocations of fruit and snacks in 2025.

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Each engraver comes with SainSmart control software, although they also support Lightburn or LaserGRBL.

Jamie explains, "Lightburn is especially beginner-friendly. There are a lot of tutorials on YouTube for learning the basics of working with this machine."

Because the engraver uses a diode laser, Jamie points out that it can only mark soft metal number plates, even at the highest laser power settings (10W). Nevertheless, it's capable of engraving and cutting wood, plastic, acrylic and more.

Online reviews show that customers find the Genmitsu Kiosk easy to operate and highly accurate.

Others noted that, while the setup was straightforward, the handbook and software installation instructions were lacking. Still, they shared that the SainSmart support team helped solve their problems. While a few reviewers found that the device occasionally malfunctioned, most believed the kiosk's performance was impressive for its size, stating that the engraver was fast, accurate and quiet.

The Engraver is priced starting at \$199 on



Laser engraver can be used on soft metals, wood, plastic and acrylic.

the company website. Shipping is available through the U.S., Canada, Europe and Australia. Choose between three laser power models: 2.5, 5 or 10W.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, SainSmart (www.sainsmart.com).