

Lavender Farm Offers Pre-Made Products

The Loess Hills Lavender Farm in Missouri Valley, Iowa, continues to bloom under its second owners.

"Founders Tim and Mary Hamer went to a lavender festival in Sequim, Wash.," says current owner Tracy Porter. "They fell in love with the concept and purchased a 17-acre parcel in Iowa for their own lavender farm."

By 2022, the couple was ready to retire. "Lavender was their baby—I don't think they would've sold to anyone who couldn't carry on the farm," Porter says.

Fortunately, she and her husband fell in love enough to buy the property.

"We don't have a background in lavender farming; it was a learn-as-we-go situation."

Today, the farm employs one full-time and two part-time workers, in addition to Porter and her husband. They currently care for about 1,000 plants, with an aim to eventually grow to 1,500 to 1,800.

"There's machinery for lavender, but we'll never scale to the point of needing it," she says.

The farm operates as a wedding venue with several pergolas, and an indoor space is available for graduations and other special events. Since taking ownership, the Porters have made many significant changes.



"Our most popular products include a spritz, balm and lotion," Porter says.

"I wanted kid-friendly elements and aim to educate the public on folklore—gnomes, fairies, we even have a troll on our bridge."

She also created a "birds, bees and butterflies" area to educate people about the importance of pollinators.

Most of the lavender is Hidcote, an English variety that's ideal for cooking and baking. The buds are processed on-site into various products sold at the farm store, along with handmade crafts from about 40 other vendors.

"Our most popular products include a spritz, balm and lotion," Porter says. "Each can be purchased in multiple sizes and even as a pack."

U-cut lavender is another popular feature, with a long-stemmed French variety being the preferred choice.

"We have no issues with our u-cut operation," Porter says. "I give visitors a basket and signage that shows them where to cut on the plant. They have to use kiddie scissors for insurance purposes, and I explain that an 'okay sign' is about one bundle."

Despite the farm's whimsical nature, it isn't immune to Mother Nature.

"The previous owners once managed 3,000 plants. Many died from disease after another plant's introduction, and the following year, plants died because Mother Nature delivered very little snow to protect them from freezing rain. Snow creates insulation," Porter says. "Without it, the plants can't tolerate below-zero temperatures and freezing rain."

Managing various plant life cycles can also be challenging.

"Baby lavender plants have entirely different care needs than mature ones," Porter says. "Mature ones do okay with rainfall, but babies need plenty of water to grow."

She recommends that future lavender farmers start slowly.

"I read about someone starting a brand-new lavender field and planting 2,000 plants in a season. That's too many. You can do your research, sure, but it's not the same as real experience. Learn through mistakes, then scale up."

Similarly, she emphasizes the importance of understanding your farm's role in the market.

"Are you interested in staying open to the public? That changes insurance, layout considerations, and more compared to selling at a farmers' market. Have a clear sense of what you want to do with your farm before you start putting in the work."

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Loess Hills Lavender Farm, 2278 Loess Hills Trail, Missouri Valley, Iowa 51555 (ph 712-642-9016; lhavenderfarm@gmail.com; www.loesshillslavender.com).

Artist's rendering of future Onego production facility.



Company Develops Chicken-Free Egg White

Onego Bio aims to introduce chicken-free egg white protein powder by 2028. The company is constructing a plant in Wisconsin to produce Bioalbumen, the protein found in egg whites.

"I want to make this very clear from the outset. We're not trying to replace chickens," stated Christopher Landowski, Onego Bio, in a recent interview. "They're still going to be the main way that people get egg products. We're just supplementing the (egg protein) supply to make sure it's available consistently."

Landowski is a Wisconsin native who moved to Finland, where he worked on breakthroughs in fungal research. In 2016, he and others in the company adapted *Trichoderma* fungi to produce food ingredients such as egg and milk proteins. In 2022, he co-founded Onego Bio to focus on commercializing egg proteins through precision fermentation of *Trichoderma*.

He explains that through fermentation, they can produce an egg white protein that tastes and handles like the real thing. Unlike chickens, the fungi never get sick or tired and never stop eating.

Trichoderma was discovered during WWII because it ate away at canvas uniforms and tents. In the fermentation process, the *Trichoderma reesei* fungus is fed corn sugar, water and specific

minerals. It secretes ovalbumin. The company compares this process to yeast fermentation, which turns sugars into alcohol. The same fungi can be genetically modified to produce other proteins, such as milk, insulin and silk.

Onego Bio highlights its potential to reduce current risks in the food industry, such as those associated with avian flu. The 2024 outbreak led to the culling of millions of hens and more than doubled egg prices.

"These days, when there's avian flu or something [else] happening to the chickens, there aren't enough eggs available. So we're trying to buffer the supply of the eggs needed for food manufacturing," Landowski recently told WPR's Wisconsin Today.

Bioalbumen contains the equivalent of 277 egg whites in a 1-kg package. It's the first non-animal egg protein with an amino acid sequence identical to that of chicken egg whites.

Potential uses for the company's product include baked goods, breakfast cereals and pasta, as well as beverages such as eggnog, ice cream and other desserts. The FDA recently approved Bioalbumen as a "Generally Recognized As Safe" food ingredient.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Onego Bio Inc., 9215 Brown Deer Rd., Suite C, San Diego, Calif. 92121 (www.onego.bio).



"Customers just stop in to make a purchase or bring their empties for an exchange," says Slegers' Director of Business Development Brad Rice.

Self-Service Propane Vending Machine Business

Summertime revelers enjoying camping or backyard BBQs no longer have to wait in long lines to fill their empty propane tanks or make endless drives to find an open propane station selling full or replacement cylinders.

Slegers, a Canadian-based propane company, has launched "My Propane Buddy," a self-service propane vending machine that sells full cylinders and accepts empty tanks in exchange. The company is growing organically, and so far, it has placed its retained-ownership machines at 66 sites across Ontario. They've also sold numerous rebranded units to a separate Ontario company.

In the U.S., Slegers has been selling its self-service equipment for about 10 years, mainly to propane providers, with 8,000 kiosks installed across 5,000 locations.

The setup is simple. Service stations only need a 110-volt power supply to operate. Each machine comes with a cellular modem and data SIM card. Payment devices communicate directly with banks and financial institutions through an acquirer.

The units hold 24 20-lb. propane cylinders. Each tank is properly certified, though it may not be new. Up to four additional boxes can be daisy-chained to the main kiosk, increas-

ing the total capacity to 96 cylinders. Only the main unit needs to be plugged into a power source.

"Customers just stop in to make a purchase or bring their empties for an exchange," says Slegers' Director of Business Development Brad Rice. "They simply make their selection on the easy-to-follow dashboard screen, follow the on-screen prompts, and listen to the automated voice instructions to complete the purchase or exchange. Once they make their payment, a bay door opens with a ready-to-go full tank, or a separate door to place the empty cylinder if making an exchange. In less than a minute, they're all set and ready to go back to their summertime fun."

Rice says pricing for service station providers is based on the consumer's needs and tailored to their operational requirements. He recommends that interested parties contact Slegers directly for details on availability, pricing and setup.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Slegers Engineered Products Inc., 5 Cuddy Blvd., London, Ontario, Canada N5V 3Y3 (ph 519-685-7444; info@slegers.ca; www.slegers.ca).