

Extended Season Fresh Strawberries

Darci Daniels sells fresh strawberries from early June through October, sometimes extending into November. She grows her day-neutral berries in hoop houses and replants the beds each spring. In between, she uses cover crops to restore the soil's fertility. It's a practice she never anticipated when she and her husband Justin bought a farm in southwestern Wisconsin in late 2022.

"We started a strawberry patch and garden for our family," recalls Daniels. "However, I kept looking at the three no-longer-used high tunnels on the neighboring farm. I thought about how much we could grow using one of them."

When Daniels and her husband asked about renting one, they learned the owners were planning to move.

"They offered to sell the whole thing to us," she says. "We ran the numbers and figured out how we could buy it."

Without a market gardening background, the Daniels' decided to start with one hoop house and a single crop—strawberries.

"We had started our own June-bearing patch, but we thought it would be hard to scale that up to a 30 by 200-ft. hoop house," she says. "We did research online about hoop house strawberry production and reached out to several growers doing organic strawberries, which we hoped to do."

One of the growers gave presentations at conferences and was available by phone and

text. He became their mentor.

With his advice, they filled one of the hoop houses with day-neutral strawberries planted in narrow beds separated by landscape fabric. Drip irrigation was installed at planting. Pollinator strips were planted outside the hoop house, and if a plant didn't survive, Daniels would fill the hole with a marigold.

"This year, we had a mix of 16 different cover crop varieties in our pollinator strips between the hoop houses," says Daniels. "They help with the soil and help bring in pollinators, which helps germination."

In 2024, they put the second hoophouse into production, followed by the third this year.

"We had some struggles with it this year and didn't get up to full production," says Daniels. "Trying to do something at this scale has a lot of question marks. Marketing was a big one."

At peak production, Daniels has harvested nearly 300 lbs. of berries per week.

"I have to have people lined up to take them, but I never know if they will until they pick them up."

Daniels also sells berries and takes orders at two local farmers markets, sells to two food co-ops, and distributes through the Iowa Food Hub, a nonprofit in northeast Iowa that distributes locally grown food.

"Strawberries don't have a super long shelf life, so selling is always a concern," says Daniels. "I have an email list of past

customers, so if I have extra, I let them know berries are available. Friends, family, and even my hairstylists will take extras and put them in the freezer."

While the variety she plants is a fairly steady producer throughout the extended season, production begins slowly. Hot weather and the runner season somewhat inhibit it.

"Production takes off again in August as the days start to shorten and the nights cool," says Daniels.

Very little goes to waste. She freezes blemished berries for jam and fruit leather after the season ends. This year, she'll be assembling holiday gift baskets of preserves.

As production slows, Daniels winds down the business. End-of-season tasks include removing plants, landscape fabric and drip lines. Cover crops are seeded, courtesy of Resilient Farm Solutions, the Daniels' other business.

Until 2022, the couple ran a dairy farm. Justin slowly grew the business to include forage seed. Leaving the dairy cows behind in 2021, he now sells forage and cover crop seed and raises pasture-fed livestock. Planting pollinator strips and rotating strawberries with cover crops was natural for him and Darci.

"We're regenerative farmers, and we know flavor and nutrition come from the soil," she says. "By the end of the season, I'm tired



"We're regenerative farmers, and we know flavor and nutrition come from the soil," says Daniels.

of picking, and hydroponic starts to look good. However, I don't think hydroponic strawberries compare to ours. Ours are sweet and juicy, and we know they're nutritious."

If the weather cooperates, they return to the hoop houses in March. They spread compost and till it into the soil along with the cover crop. By early April, they add new plants, reinstall drip lines, and lay landscape fabric.

"By the first week of June, I hope to be picking strawberries again," says Daniels.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Darci Daniels, Viroqua, Wis. (ph 715-896-5780; gvfarmstead@gmail.com; www.garden-ridge.com).



Designed to help develop new uses for animal and plant products, the new center doubles AURI's pilot lab footprint and capabilities.

Bioindustrial Innovation Center Expands

Minnesota ag entrepreneurs are gaining support through the new Bioindustrial Innovation Center. The state's Agricultural Utilization Research Institute (AURI) is expanding with over 20,000 sq. ft. of pilot laboratory and office space. The center features a 1,500-sq. ft., FDA-certified, food-grade lab for producing and processing food-grade materials.

"With financial support from the state of Minnesota, AURI invested in new space and equipment to catalyze the commercial market expansion of ag-derived products," says Shannon Schlecht, AURI executive director. "The center has capabilities in anaerobic digestion, biomass drying, decortication and oilseed pressing, as well as densification and processing operations."

He notes that AURI is working to fulfill its mission by serving as a resource for ag producers, businesses and entrepreneurs to develop new uses and markets for agricultural products and to keep ag enterprises thriving. Over the past five years, AURI has partnered with businesses on 210 projects. Of these, 114 were in the food sector, 55 in the bioindustrial sector, and 41 involved both sectors.

Schlecht notes that the 210 projects

generated \$187 million in new annual sales, \$85 million in new capital investment, and 717 jobs created or retained in Minnesota. The estimated future impact for Minnesota includes 797 jobs created or retained and an additional \$266 million in capital investment.

The new center doubles AURI's pilot lab footprint and capabilities to meet growing demand. It's designed to help develop new uses for animal and plant products and assist in scaling them to an industrial level.

Pilot plant equipment includes a 1-ton-per-hour pellet mill, pellet cooler, hammer mill, pneumatic and belt conveyors, oil presses, screeners, dryers, dehuller, burr mill, and more. Equipment can be reconfigured to replicate industrial processes and workflows.

The center features a pilot digester with two 1,250-gal. tanks and both mechanical and hydraulic mixers. They can operate in mesophilic and thermophilic conditions and provide real-time monitoring of gas production.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, AURI, 510 Cty. Rd. 71, Suite 120, Crookston, Minn. 56716 (ph 218-281-7600; communications@auri.org; www.auri.org).



FiberCut operates at speeds up to 15 mph, cutting tall stalks into manageable 27 to 78 in. sections.

Multi-Height Sickle Mower Harvests Tall Crops

Bish Enterprises of Nebraska recently introduced its redesigned FiberCut, a multi-height, tow-behind sickle mower built for high-efficiency harvesting of hemp, kenaf and other tall biomass crops. The new FiberCut features a 14-ft. cutting knife—the longest available—enabling it to harvest more acres in less time while cutting fuel and labor costs. Its modular design lets operators add, remove and adjust the machine's cutting arms.

Operators can use one to four bars simultaneously, offering flexibility for different field conditions. The unit is compatible with a variety of tractors and 3-pt. mount categories.

"Unlike conventional cutters, it features a hydraulic drive system instead of belts, reducing maintenance and improving reliability, while reducing overall tractor horsepower requirements, which saves fuel," says Andrew Bish, Bish Enterprises COO.

Four models offer cutting widths ranging from 8 to 14 ft. The machine operates at speeds up to 15 mph, cutting tall stalks into 27 to 78 in. sections. That efficiency makes raking, tedding and baling easier, reduces

wear and tear, and shortens retting and drying time. At those speeds, it can harvest nearly 17 acres per hour. Adjustable arms (an industry first), a proprietary modular design, and an optional highway tow package make it more flexible and cost-effective than single-purpose competitors.

"This isn't just a refinement, it's a transformation," Bish says. "We listened to farmers. They need stronger, smarter tools that maximize efficiency and lower operational costs. The new FiberCut reflects that commitment."

FiberCut is manufactured in Nebraska from American steel, using as many domestically sourced parts as possible. It's sold across North America through its dealer network and direct sales.

Pricing varies based on cutting width and options, typically ranging from \$65,000 to \$95,000.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Bish Enterprises, 508 S. D Rd., Giltner, Neb. 68841 (ph 833-856-1110; sales@bishcom.com; www.bishenterprise.com).