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Company Puts Waste Flax Straw To Use

Prairie Clean Energy (PCE) of Saskatchewan, Canada, aims to harness the millions of tons of unutilized flax straw residue across North America for innovative uses, including animal bedding and biofuel.

"Our founder, Trevor Thomas, was driving from Regina to Calgary when he drove by burning flax straw. He started wondering if there was a better way to utilize that resource," says PCE's Chief Strategy Of-

ficer Brita Lind. "He began researching flax straw's qualities and discovered it makes an excellent biomass fuel, among other benefits. Thomas launched Prairie Clean Energy in 2020 to buy flax straw from farmers and process it for sustainable uses."

Saskatchewan farmers account for close to a third of global flax production. "PCE has purchased over 16,000 tons of flax straw from prairie farmers in the past two years," Lind

says. "Our unique process decorticates the straw to separate it into flax fibre and shive. We have two patents pending on processing and pelletizing the flax shive, with more patents being applied for." Likewise, PCE plans to open a straw processing facility in Saskatchewan in the fall of 2025, the first and only flax straw processing plant in North America.

Flax straw is a waste byproduct of harvesting flax seed. It's devoid of nutrients, hard to till into the soil, and has virtually no market value. Most farmers have little choice but to burn it in their fields. But PCE believes that's an excellent opportunity for farmers, customers and the company.

The straw burns clean and hot and has low ash content and moisture levels. The chemical composition is ideal for power and heat generation, as it has a high net calorific value, equivalent to wood. "If you're using propane, electricity or diesel to heat your operation, consider switching to PCE flax fuel pellets and a biomass boiler process. You could regain your investment and start seeing savings within five years," says Lind.

Likewise, PCE's other products, like flax-based animal bedding, have low dust, and their high absorbency means they require less mucking—typically every three to four days

instead of daily. A lower pH improves the absorption of ammonia for significantly less smell and better animal health. It's more effective than wood shavings and is fully biodegradable, like field compost. "PCE flax pellets offer a sustainable and superior animal bedding for barns, rodeos or farm shows," she says. "We sell our horse/animal bedding and biomass fuel directly to consumers and plan to launch a cat litter product soon."

PCE currently has thousands of acres of flax straw under contract. The company buys flax straw directly from farmers, offering them double benefits as they profit from a waste crop and are spared the hassle of burning it.

"If you're interested in any PCE product or selling your flax straw to PCE, please visit our website," says Lind. "Every year when we purchase flax straw, we start with the farmers who have signed Right of First Refusal (ROFR) sales agreements, then others on our list."

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"When we started, we were selling about 1/2 of the grain we produced directly to consumers," says Lozensky. "Today, it's 10% of the grain we grow on our 2,200 acres and growing."



Farm Finds Success Selling Homegrown Grain

Only five years ago, DeAnna Lozensky didn't know what wheat berries were. Today, the North Dakota farmer and her husband, Kelly, grow multiple grain varieties and sell them as wheat berries, flour and pasta to consumers, as bulk wheat sales to bakers, and into the wholesale

market. Much of it goes to buyers on the East and West Coasts. All of this is because she answered an ad.

"I answered an ad for desiccant-free wheat berries and had to look them up to see what they were," she admits. "When I called him, he told me he milled his own flour. Then he

asked, 'You grow wheat and don't eat it?' That was the power of one. He changed my perspective."

After sending two 5-gal. buckets of conventional wheat berries to her new customer, Lozensky got a countertop mill and learned the benefits of freshly milled flour. She also discovered there was a market for farm-fresh wheat berries and, in particular, for ancient grains.

That was 2020. She soon had an online store, and by 2021, she and her husband were planting ancient grains like einkorn, in addition to their modern hard red spring wheat.

"When we started, we were selling about 1/2 of 1% of the grain we produced directly to consumers," says Lozensky. "Today, it's 10% of the grain we grow on our 2,200 acres and growing."

An excess of cracked einkorn that first year led to the idea of milling the grain. This led to applying for a grant for a \$22,000 North American Stone Mill. By February 2022, they'd developed a line of whole wheat pasta (Vol. 46, No. 3) and were also selling flour and flaked barley.

In June 2024, they moved the business into a rented space in nearby Minot. It contains the stone mill, a commercial flaker for barley and an Italian pasta extruder. Lozensky mills flour, packages it and ships it to customers.

"I fill orders the same day I mill, so they get

the freshest flour possible if not milling at home," she says. "It's a one-woman show."

With the flour in hand, she also makes the pasta. "I can produce about 100 lbs. per day in three shapes," she says. "I use flour from Rouge de Bordeaux, which sets it apart."

Rouge de Bordeaux is only one of the grains and flours sold under their Guardian Grains brand. Turkey Red, spelt and hard red spring wheat are sold as wheat berries and flour. Egyptian hullless barley is sold as berries, flour and flakes.

Repeat customers benefit from a no-cost membership that awards points that can be used for discounts on future orders.

A key component of Guardian Grains' success is its website and online store, which Lozensky created herself using Wix, a point-and-click website builder.

Lozensky sells a line of German-made, countertop stone mills and a flaker for home millers.

"The strong demand indicates the growing popularity of home milling," says Lozensky.

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Veteran Turns Passion For Wood Carving Into Business

Al Weix of Eau Claire, Wis., turned to woodworking in a low moment. Now, he strives to bless others with his projects.

Weix is a Vietnam War veteran. "I had mental health issues after back surgery in 1991," he says. "I didn't know what direction my life was going." Having recently lost his job of 23 years, he wasn't sure how to spend his time. "Woodworking just came to me; God inspired me to go in this direction."

Weix began by creating patterns for project ideas. "It's cliché, but the first thing I ever made was a birdhouse. Then, I moved on to doll houses. I was so enthusiastic about this work that I had a neighbor come by the house once. She wanted to know what all the racket was

about. She went home with a doll house."

Today, he specializes in making trains. Each includes interchangeable parts, so he's always working on multiple trains. Each is Weix's own creation. "I've made all kinds of train cars. Name trains with each letter on a different car, packer trains, tankers, barrel cars, flat beds, drums, cattle, cargo, coal, and lumber. I wanted to make a passenger train for a long time. It took lots of deliberation, but once I began, I got it right the first time."

Weix sells his custom woodwork, and those interested can reach out to him through email. He'll provide pricing information based on the request, as the designs vary too much to give general numbers.

As much as Weix enjoys the woodworking process, the greatest joy is seeing how people



Al Weix sells wooden name trains he makes from his own designs.

respond to his work. "I left one of my name trains on the desk of my chiropractor. She had tears in her eyes when she came back and saw it."

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