

Family Farm Sells Meat Subscription Boxes

Family Traditions Beef, a fifth-generation family farm in Vallonia, Ind., sells beef and pork online in bulk and through a subscription model. “Don grow up on a grain and cattle farm,” says cofounder Jennifer Shoemaker. “He always dreamed of selling his beef directly to consumers. And not just any beef; he wanted to raise calves from birth and control the whole process.”

The pair bought 25 bred heifers in 2015 and grew their herd to selling size by 2018. Current operations see approximately 70 cows calving every fall. Every cow is raised on their property from conception to butchering, which takes place 45 min. away at Memphis Meats.

“Starting Family Traditions Beef gave me a way to stay home and raise the kids while growing a business,” says Shoemaker. “With our row crop farm, cow herd and four kids, selling in a brick-and-mortar store or Saturdays at farmers’ markets wouldn’t work for us. Instead, we set up a website and started marketing outside our local area.”

Health and sustainability remain priorities. The cattle are kept in open fields with

well-drained soils that minimize exposure to dampness and mud, and most of the farm is planted without tillage to best capture nutrients, build soil structure, and increase organic matter. Selective breeding makes it possible to fine-tune breed genetics without relying on synthetic hormones to boost performance.

This process intensifies the meat’s natural flavors while adding tenderness that’s impossible to replicate.

It’s possible to purchase an eighth of beef (\$5 lbs., \$797), a quarter (110 lbs., \$1,485), a half (220 lbs., \$2,860) or a whole (440 lbs., \$5,500).

The operation expanded in 2023 to sell Berkshire pork raised by friends in Northern Indiana. An all-pork bundle and bulk pork options are available. Plans are in the works to sell local chicken by late 2025.

Roughly half of customers purchase in bulk, while the rest prefer a subscription model. “Some people don’t have room for a big freezer, and others simply don’t want one even if they do have room. Those customers are buying our bundles monthly,” says Shoemaker. “Others want to save money, so they order in bulk.”

The Midwest Best Box remains the most popular product. For \$189, it features six lbs. each of Angus beef and Berkshire pork in various cuts that change monthly. “It’s the perfect mix of everything we offer,” says Shoemaker.

All meat is shipped out frozen in sturdy cardboard with a 1 1/2-in. recyclable liner and packs of ice. Free shipping is available through Indiana, Illinois, Ohio and Kentucky, while discounted options are available across surrounding states.

“What’s most rewarding about a direct-to-consumer setup is getting to know your customers,” says Shoemaker. “Many respond to my emails regularly; I feel like we’re friends. One customer in California even sent us a Christmas present. And it’s so special when a previous customer returns to sign up for a subscription. Even if they’ve never written a formal review, we know they’re happy and want more.”

Still, the online model has some challenges. “We’d prefer if customers didn’t skip months or pause their subscription because it’s harder for us to plan. But at the same time, we know life happens,” she says. Marketing remains



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another hurdle. “We’re still experimenting with the right advertising tools to produce consistent ROI. We’ve tried Facebook ads, Google ads, influencers, newspapers and local TV. Some worked for a time, but nothing has really stuck. If there’s a magic answer, please let me know.”

Despite these obstacles, the family recommends selling direct-to-consumer as a small farm. “Do it,” says Shoemaker. “It’s possible with the right tools. There are so many online courses that can help.”

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Oaty Beer Is Catching On

Brewing beer with oats is a win-win-win for Mark Heise at Rebellion Brewing in Regina, Saskatchewan. He buys oats from local farmers, makes beer his customers like, and wins awards with the brew.

“I’ve always used oats in my brewing, starting as a home brewer and when I went commercial about 10 years ago,” says Heise. “Initially, I only used them in strong beers like an oatmeal stout. Over the years, I started using them in different styles of beer to adjust flavor to our customers’ tastes. With all the oats grown here, they’re easy to source.”

Like Heise, other brewers have gone beyond stout, adding oats to the mix with other beers. “If you go to conferences, you hear more about brewing with oats, and farmers tell me there is more of a market,” says Heise. “Craft breweries like ours don’t have the economies of scale to buy in container-size quantities. We tend to pay more, which farmers like.”

Shawna Mathieson, Prairie Oat Growers Association, has the numbers to back up Heise’s assumption. Her best estimate is that North American breweries use about 11.9 million lbs. of oats, and interest is growing.

“We continue to hear of the good mouth feel of oats in beer and that it creates a nice haze that people like,” she says. “Oat use has been growing, with some brewers using a significant amount, like Rebellion Brewery, which uses about 100 lbs. of oats per batch of beer. There was an oat beer made by Battle River Brewery in the past called Fookinootz. This beer was made with 100% oats. Alberta Oat Growers showcased it at their Annual General Meeting in 2023, and it was very well liked.”

Heise notes that India Pale Ales (IPA) were a natural home for the addition of oats. IPAs are often thought of as having a bitter taste. Add oats, which are high in protein, and the taste softens.

“The oats make for easier drinking and a more appealing beer,” says Heise. “They create a natural haze, thus the name of our Hazy IPA.”

When sourcing his oats, Heise doesn’t



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have far to go. Mathieson points out that 90% of the oats produced in Canada are produced between Alberta, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan, and Canada is the largest exporter of oats in the world.

“This is because oats like the cooler temperatures of western Canada,” she says. “It’s estimated that Canada supplies 97% of U.S. oat imports, with 98.4% of the oat products used in the U.S. coming from Canadian sources.”

With high-quality oats available locally, all Heise needs is for them to be well cleaned and stored. The exception to the rule is toasted, malted oats. He’s willing to pay a premium for the value-added grain.

“The toasting and malting give beers brewed with them a real depth of flavor,” he says. “They produce a nutty flavor, one of the tastiest things you can add when brewing beer.”

Heise should know. In 2023, Rebellion Brewing won a Canada Beer Cup award for their Brown Ale, brewed with toasted, malted oats. It also won a Prairie Beer Award.

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They’re Marketing Tree Range Chickens

Tree-range production is a very old, yet surprisingly new, way to raise chickens. While poultry originally came from jungle environments, modern production methods mainly rely on confinement, with a growing segment of free-range producers.

Over the past 8 to 10 years, a subset of free-range producers, led by Reginaldo Haslett-Marroquin (Vol. 47, No. 4), has embraced the belief that trees are for the birds. These tree-range producers are members of the Regenerative Ag Alliance (RAA). They raise chickens in paddocks planted with hazelnuts and elderberries in the understory, and a variety of hardwoods in the overstory.

The largest group of tree-range producers is in Minnesota and Wisconsin. All are within two to three hours of a Stacyville, Iowa, processing plant and market their birds through Tree-Range Farms.

“Tree-Range Farms is a collaboration of 11 farmers who together produce over 50,000 birds,” says Tedd Pederson, Tree-Range Farms.

Pederson has the challenge of finding customers for the collaborative while ensuring it has enough supply to meet existing and new customers’ demands. The fact that tree-range chickens are a seasonal production model adds to the challenge.

“We don’t produce birds for three to five months a year,” explains Pederson. “We like to say our chicken is freshly frozen. We try to have chicken on hand year-round, but this year we sold out.”

Pederson expects to have chicken available by late May this year. Processed whole birds average 4 lbs. He says prices can vary by the cut, weight, and whether organic or premium natural.

When available, Tree-Range Farms chicken can be found at 17 retail stores, mostly in Minnesota. Four online marketers offer home delivery. Four restaurants, one in Chicago, also carry Tree-Range Farms chicken.

While the production, processing and marketing of Tree-Range Farms chicken are limited geographically, the tree-range concept is not. RAA hopes the Tree-Range Farms template will spread.



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The organization offers Regenerative Poultry Production Training online. Prices range from free videos to a \$15 introduction to the full program, which costs \$997. The latter is a structured, 11-week course with assignments, guest speakers, and other materials. It covers the mechanics of raising poultry humanely, reducing feed costs, and building secure and labor-friendly infrastructure. Students receive a poultry production manual, a one-on-one consultation with Haslett-Marroquin, and discounted future consultations.

“Once a farmer is trained through the RAA, receives a site visit, and contracts with Tree-Range Farms, many logistical aspects of production are taken care of,” suggests Louis Kemp, RAA. “All chick and feed delivery logistics are managed by RAA, as well as the costs associated with those taken care of upfront. Processing logistics are also managed collectively, including scheduling processing slots, sending a transport to pick up and deliver the birds, and assisting in loading the birds themselves.”

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