

If you're looking for new ways to add to your bottom line, take a look at the money-making ideas featured here and on the next page.

If you've found or heard about a new income-boosting idea, we'd like to hear about it. Send details to: **FARM SHOW Magazine**, P.O. Box 1029, Lakeville, Minn. 55044 (ph 800-834-9665) or email us at: editor@farmshow.com.



People buy hickory oil for \$20 for an 8-oz bottle or \$240 per gallon for bulk oil.

Hickory Oil Offers Impressive Harvest Potential

A nut tree native to North America offers untapped potential for farming ventures, even for those without land. Levi Geyer, founder of Fancy Twig Farm, is a case study in success.

"Hickory oil allows me to farm without owning land," he says. "Most everyone I've asked has been happy to let me harvest from their wild trees."

The yellowbud hickory is native throughout the eastern United States. It's often found along margins such as ditches, forest edges and back pastures, and it can be easily identified by its pointed sulfur-yellow buds. You can also look for gently ridged bark with an interlacing diamond pattern and compound leaves with seven to eleven pinnately compound leaflets.

"Tree crops come with several perks," says Geyer. "They don't require planting each year, they don't require tillage, they can be integrated with livestock, their roots hold the soil in place and improve water infiltration, and they can be used for firewood when you're done with them."

He also highlights the benefits of having different tree species within one area.

"With enough diversity, you don't have to spray for pests. You end up with a very low-input system (except for labor), which is perfect for weathering a recession or rising oil prices."

Yellowbud hickory nuts are a largely untapped source of cooking oil. The thin-shelled nuts that fall from trees contain kernels so rich in oil that the oil can be squeezed out between the fingertips.

Geyer reports that three 5-gal. buckets of nuts can yield a gallon of oil. Most foragers can expect to harvest between one and three buckets per hour under a promising tree. While nut trees have low and high years, even in low years, some trees still perform above expectations.

All hickory nuts have a thin outer husk that must be removed shortly after harvest. Then the nuts are placed in a drying bin with airflow.

"Once they're dry, they get sorted to

remove the bad nuts that turn a darker shade of brown," Geyer says. "Then they're pre-crushed in a roller mill and fed into a screw expeller press. Finally, the oil is filtered with a filter press or centrifuge, then bottled for sale."

While the nuts themselves are bitter, their tannins aren't oil-soluble and are naturally removed during pressing.

Healthy oils are difficult to grow and source locally and sustainably. Cold-pressed hickory oil has a fatty acid profile comparable to olive oil, with a milder, nutty flavor and a smoke point of 405 F. The oil can be used to sauté vegetables, make salad dressing, roast squash and potatoes, and bake bread and desserts.

Geyer shares the bounty from his free forest harvests by planting hickory trees each spring in his local community.

"My goal is for everyone who wants to be able to harvest nuts, whether for food or a little extra cash."

He takes full advantage of his supply in everyday life.

"The oil is amazing. My fiancé and I eat about a quarter cup a day as our main fat source. People buy it for \$20 for an 8-oz bottle or \$240 a gallon for bulk oil. Once more people start doing it and scale up a bit, I think the price will drop, but with enough volume, I can still pay \$1 per pound for nuts and be profitable."

Today at Fancy Twig Farm, Geyer continues researching new processing equipment and procedures for husk removal, drying, crushing, pressing and oil purification. He's quick to note that he's far from the first to use hickory oil.

"Indigenous people used yellowbud hickories. They lived here for 10,000+ years and kept the soil in Iowa at about 8% organic matter. In 200 years of being here, we've dropped that to 2%. We could learn a thing or two from them."

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USDA-accredited farm sells livestock to a variety of large and small zoos, individuals and drive-thru parks.

Farm Finds Its Niche With Exotic Animals

Mike and Tammy Herren of Kamaroo Farms in Kampsville, Ill., have found meaning in agriculture by focusing on exotic animals and traditional farming practices.

"I've marched to the beat of a different drummer since I was 16 years old," he says. "I was always interested in livestock, but my interests leaned more exotic."

Herren came from a traditional farming background but didn't like the commodification that came with the industry.

"I wanted to set my own prices on my animals and products, and I didn't want to rely on government subsidies."

He first raised ring-necked pheasants.

"They're easy to raise and cheap to keep," he says. "And I've always liked birds. A lot of people consider them a gateway animal."

After graduating from high school in 1978, he naturally moved on to larger birds, such as emus and ostriches. He met a grandfather-like figure in Kansas, where he went to school, who had buffalo, elk and camels. In 1985, Herren added a buffalo herd to his operation.

"We had 63 head of cows at our peak. They're more hands-off than cows, but require good fences and strong and tall corrals."

Elk joined the operation in 1990, and he maintained both populations for decades.

"I've had about a hundred crossbred beef cows my whole adult life," Herren says. "I'd sell feeders, but exotics proved so much more profitable because camels require less feed and equipment. Ten years ago, 10 camels, for context, had as much value as a hundred cows."

This makes exotic animals a uniquely high-risk, high-reward venture.

"One female bred camel is worth \$20,000. You don't need a lot to make a profit. But if you lose one, that's a blow."

Kamaroo Farms camels appear in nativity scenes but otherwise leave the property only for sale. Camel dairies are frequent buyers due to the growing popularity of camel milk among lactose-intolerant individuals.

"There's only a few USDA-certified dairies in the United States," Herren says. "The market seems poised to grow."

Being USDA-accredited, the farm sells livestock to a variety of large and small zoos, individuals and drive-thru parks. An Airbnb is a secondary operation, and Kamaroo Farms offers tours to guests by appointment only.

"We have all these exotic animals, but kids love the chickens and tend to be the most popular," Herren says. "Kids love collecting eggs. And bottle-feeding kangaroos or baby

camels, when that's available."

He finds it extremely rewarding to teach adults and children about farming.

"Most have no clue what's involved or where their food comes from. Sometimes people ask why we can't let the animals go free. We have to explain that they aren't wild; they've been in captivity for generations."

According to Herren, exotic animal health requires careful attention, in part because of limited access to exotic animal veterinarians. A good, willing vet is a great help. Parasite issues are all too common, as most animals live in climates that differ from those where they evolved.

"We test our camels for parasites five times a year," Herren says. "And kangaroo care is almost impossible to find in the States. I purchased a medical textbook from Australia for \$300 years back that's more than paid for itself."

He also suggests seeking help from other owners of exotic animals.

"Find farmers who have been into exotics longer than you have and pick their brains. An experienced owner can help you know not to keep camels and goats together. I see it all the time, and it makes me cringe. Goats and sheep carry diseases and parasites that are harmful to camels."

Some of Kamaroo's animals have come as rescues.

"Camel rides are popular nationally, but the animals occasionally decide they're done," Herren says. "They'll just sit down. We've gotten a few rejects that way."

Sustainable farming lectures are occasionally offered, and the farm hosts outside speakers. Past events included Raising Quail for Fun and Profit and Raising Heirloom Corn for Profit. Kamaroo's heirloom corn is grown using compost from its own animals and then milled into grits and cornmeal for sale. The farm hopes to add a water-powered gristmill soon.

"We're a farm with the same trials and troubles and glories and goals that any other farm has," Herren says. "It's all hard work. We're at the mercy of the weather; we still buck hay bales. Farming in any capacity is a calling in the truest sense of the word."

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