

Rural Couple Raises Exotic Birds In Basement

Jack and Kathy Mulville operate a confinement breeding operation at their rural home near Moravia, Iowa. Unlike their neighbors who raise hogs, however, they raise parakeets.

The Mulvilles keep about 200 breeding birds in a specially-built room in the basement of their house, where the temperature and humidity is carefully controlled. They sell the offspring to people in three surrounding states, delivering most by car but shipping a few by air. They also sell to pet shops, and sometimes to people who come to their door.

"Each breeding pair produces about 15 birds per year which we sell when they're about two months old. That's how long it takes the male bird to teach the babies how to eat on their own," says Jack.

The Mulvilles specialize in parakeets with California colors, better known as pastels. Violet is the most popular color, followed by blue, yellow, white and charcoal grey. "Pastel-colored parakeets are very popular now," says Jack. "We sell all we can raise for \$8 each."

Jack learned the parakeet business from his dad in Tucson, Ariz., who once owned 10,000 pairs of breeders. "Once you get into it there's good money to be made."

The Mulvilles say raising exotic birds in confinement isn't difficult. They use a "colony breeding" method, raising para-

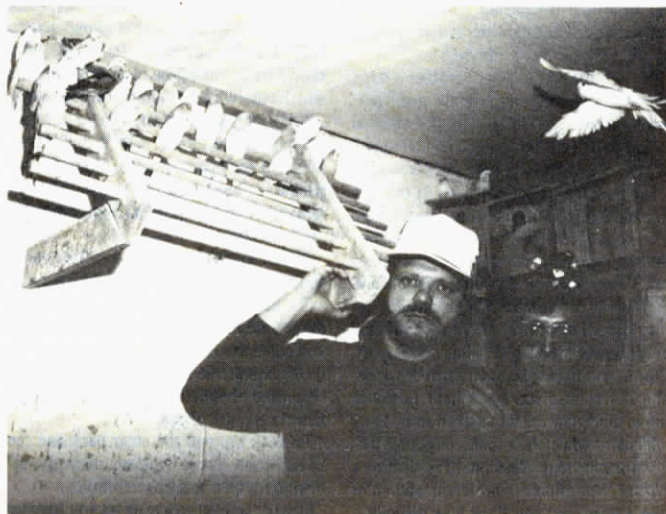
keets in 6 by 8 ft. pens, with 50 - 53 males and 50 females to a pen. "There's less work with colony breeding than with cage breeding, because you can feed and water 50 birds at once," notes Jack.

The Mulvilles make their own plywood nest boxes, which mount on the wall. For feed and water, they use metal dishes and rabbit drinkers. They feed the birds millet, rolled oats and sunflower seeds. According to Jack, vitamins and antibiotics are the key to parakeet health. "Parakeets are very susceptible to respiratory diseases induced by feather dust. I feed them poultry drugs scaled down to the parakeets' smaller size."

It takes about 10 min. a day to feed and water the birds, and about one hour a week to clean pens. "While cleaning pens, we generally wear masks to cut down on inhalation of dust," he adds.

The Mulvilles say their basement provides inexpensive, convenient housing for the parakeets. "Parakeets don't like it hot. They won't breed and their eggs will dry out," says Jack. "Our basement stays cool and as long as we clean the pens regularly, there's only a faint smell. However, feather dust can be a problem. We use a sprayer to wash down the dust and keep it out of the rest of the house."

Parakeets live five to eight years and can be taught to talk in about two weeks. "They learn to say five to seven words at a time,"



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says Kathy. "After they learn those words, you can begin teaching them another series of five to seven words. This procedure can be repeated as long as they live, although it's better to teach them to talk while they're young." Males are easier to teach to talk than the females, she adds.

The Mulvilles also own a breeding flock of 11 cockatiels which are colored white

and grey. White cockatiels cost \$65 each and grey ones \$40. They're fed a diet similar to the parakeets but with the addition of sunflower seeds and hard-boiled eggs for protein.

For more information, contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Jack Mulville, Rt. 1, Moravia, Iowa 52571 (ph 515 724-3696).

BAKES 36 LOAVES OF BREAD AT A TIME

On-Farm Brick Oven Boosts Value Of Wheat Crop

The value of a bushel of wheat skyrockets when you turn it into wholesome, easy-to-bake whole-wheat bread right on the farm, according to Californian Alan Scott who specializes in building "retained heat" brick ovens for on-farm use.

"Adobe and clay ovens are as old as agriculture itself. We've updated the idea with the latest new technologies and materials to build state-of-the-art ovens that provide an excellent way to boost farm income without leaving the farm," says Scott. His company, Oven Crafters, works with farmers every step of the way in designing and building wood or gas-powered brick ovens and then setting up a complete baking operation. He even helps develop ideas for marketing the home-baked bread to nearby markets or throughout the U.S. through the Postal Service or UPS.

One of his customers, Richard Callan and his wife Patti, who farm near Woodland, Calif., worked with Scott to set up their farm-based operation. Using Scott's designs and following his direction, they built their own brick oven with the help of a corp of volunteers. "The 36-loaf oven is equipped with the latest in temperature sensing equipment, insulation materials, ash disposal devices, and it can be transported to a new location, if necessary. The Callans invested less than \$2,000 in the oven, which is less than the 30-quart mixer they use to mix dough. They fire the oven with wood from their own and surrounding farms," says Scott.

The oven bakes 36 2-lb. loaves per hour, or about 200 loaves a day. The bread - made from "organically grown" hard red wheat - brings a retail price of \$3 per loaf in nearby

stores and as far as 400 miles away in Los Angeles.

"They're doing 60 times better than the average wheat farmer who only receives about 5 cents for every loaf of store-bought bread," says Scott.

The Callans bake a whole grain bread - using wheat they grind themselves - that is simply leavened with a continually replenished "starter" mix. Popular among "health food" lovers, there are no costs for yeast or any additives for the bread other than salt.

Scott says he has the only business of its kind outside Europe, where brick ovens are popular. In addition to designing ovens, he sells pre-cast oven components and publishes a mail order catalog that contains all the products necessary to start a farm-based bread baking business as well as a selection of detailed oven plans and building instructions.

"You could use cornstalks, shelled corn, and other farm-based 'free' fuels to fire the oven, which makes this business a very profitable enterprise for the farm," says Scott.

For more information, contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Alan Scott, Oven Crafters, P.O. Box 24, Tomales, Calif. 94971 (ph 707 878-2028).

The 35-loaf oven is equipped with the latest in temperature sensing equipment, insulation materials, and ash disposal devices. Friends and relatives helped build the big oven (bottom photo) following construction plans supplied by Oven Crafters. The company also helps farmer-bakers learn how to market the bread.

