



Automated equipment helps Paul Coleman produce millions of worms per year.

Worm Farming Not A “Get Rich Quick” Business

By Jim Ruen

Have you seen those “get rich quick” ads touting the wonders of worm farming?

We decided to look into the business and discovered that you can make money, but you have to do it the old fashioned way; you have to work for it. Of course, many ads suggest otherwise, promising to buy all your worms once you buy their breeding stock, equipment and supplies. But experts we talked to in the worm farming business say the companies that place those ads aren't always what they claim to be.

“There are companies out there that prey on the farming community,” says Paul Coleman, Earlybird Worm Farm, Hodges, S.C., “I have met people who paid \$10,000 for 100 lbs. of worms and a harvesting machine. They could have bought the worms for \$700 and the best machine available for \$2,400.”

Coleman views such outfits as little better than pyramid sales scams and advises staying away from contract production. Zorba Frankel, managing editor of Worm Digest, Eugene, Oregon, warns people to be realistic and careful when considering contracts but says they can be a good place to start.

“You need to view buy back companies as business partners,” he counsels. “If you are thinking about hiring them as your marketing department, check them out really well and visit a number of farms doing business with them. Frequently, we have seen buy-back companies grossly exaggerating reproduction rates.”

While many companies claim you can double production every three months, Frankel notes that there are many uncertainties in worm production. A sudden change in barometric pressure can cause worms to go nuts. If the heat reaches 95° in the beds, they will die. Change the bedstock, and production may stop for a month while the worms acclimate themselves to the new bedding.

Depending on your skills, there may be no reason to be affiliated with a buy-back worm company, notes Frankel.

Coleman is one grower who went the independent route. He has raised worms for about five years, starting out with a plywood box and Belgium red worms he bought from a man on the Internet. Initially, he sold worms to local bait shops. Today, he ships 8 to 12 million worms per season (both bulk worms and cut bait) and packages and sells their castings as well. He advises people interested in worm farming to start out small and work their way up.

“A wheelbarrow and a pitchfork are your best friends,” he says. “It’s a 365 day a year job. If you’re looking for instant gratification, it’s not going to happen.”

Coleman has 2,000 square feet of beds and is adding more, but he has yet to quit his day job. He emphasizes learning from personal experience and talking to lots of people in the business. Build production slowly as you build markets, first in your local area and then expanding with distributors and the Internet as you grow. Integrity, he says, is key, while the real secret to success comes with hard work and marketing the worms in every possible way. He notes that the worm castings, their so-called waste product, is often worth more than the worm itself. It just needs to be marketed.

“Get out there and work at it,” he says. “You’ll be able to sell more than you can grow.”

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Add-On Power Steering For Older Ford Tractors

“Using the front-end loader on a 1950’s vintage tractor can be a lot of work. Our new power steering kit makes the tractor much easier to steer, yet doesn’t change the look of the tractor because it looks like a factory add-on,” says Roland Jackson, Jetmore, Kansas.

The kit is designed to fit 8N, Funk conversion, NAA, 600, 800, and early 4000 series Ford tractors. According to Jackson, these tractors have manual steering and the weight of the load on the front end sometimes makes them next to impossible to steer.

“We’ve got a clean, strong, steering unit that works like factory steering, yet doesn’t destroy the tractor’s antique value by drilling holes or by welding,” says Jackson. “The steering cylinders are built specifically for the JPS unit and are much stronger than they need to be. If you should ever have trouble with them, the cylinder parts are a common size and can be rebuilt in a local hydraulic shop.”

A step by step instruction manual with detailed photos is provided to help in the installation process.

A divider keeps the steering wheel from jerking or moving when using the loader simultaneously with the power steering. “The



Power steering kit makes older Ford tractors much easier to steer, without changing the look of the tractor.

steering will always be fast and easy, regardless of engine rpm’s. There’s no mechanical linkage to get in the way. The divider has a pressure relief valve built into it, with the correct pressure set at the factory and doesn’t need to be adjusted,” says Jackson.

The kit sells for \$1,195 plus \$65 S&H.

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“It didn’t cost much and was easy to put together,” says Lloyd Meffert, who used parts salvaged from a Deere 45 combine to add power steering to his 1962 IH tractor.

Low-Cost Power Steering Added To IH Utility Tractor

Lloyd Meffert, Hettick, Ill., used parts salvaged from a Deere 45 combine to add power steering to his 1962 International Harvester 340 utility loader tractor.

“I’ve used it for several years with no problems. It didn’t cost much and was easy to put together,” says Meffert.

He used the combine’s hydraulic pump, oil reservoir, and power steering cylinder, which had a spool valve built into it. He mounted the pump on one side of the loader frame and mounted the reservoir about 2 ft. behind it. He bolted one end of the power steering cylinder to the tractor frame and attached the other end to the tie rod on the left side of the tractor.

He also replaced the tractor’s original direct current generator with a GM alternator that came off a Chevy Camaro. A second pulley that he welded onto the alternator is used to belt-drive the power steering pump.

“The tractor already had hydraulics but

there was no easy way to tap into it to provide power steering. Adding the hydraulic pump and cylinder was a relatively simple way to do the job,” says Meffert. “I replaced the tractor’s original generator because I wanted to convert the tractor’s original 6-volt electrical system to 12 volts. The only problem I’ve had is that I used a small 3/8-in. belt to drive the power steering pump, and if there’s a heavy load in the bucket and I try to turn the steering wheel, the belt can slip. A wider belt would solve the problem.”

The tractor was originally equipped with separate steering rods on the left and right and didn’t have a cross rod all the way underneath it. Meffert disconnected one of the rods and made a tie rod that goes all the way from one front wheel to the other.

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