



Portable distiller provides medicinal plant growers in western Canada with an innovative way to process their specialty crops.

Mobile Distiller Processes Specialty Crops

Medicinal plant growers in western Canada found an innovative way to process their specialty crops by building a mobile distiller back in 1999.

Since then, the unit has been used by numerous growers to process over 50 different crops to extract essential oils.

The portable distiller cost about \$50,000 (Can.) to build, funding that was raised in part, by farmer-members of the Alberta Natural Health Agricultural Network (ANHAN), which focuses on building opportunities in natural health products. Alberta government staff also contributed time and expertise. About half of the funding came from northern Alberta forestry companies because a variety of non-timber forest products can be made from branches, needles, leaves, shrubs, and flowers.

Some of the field plants being cultivated for essential oil production include, basil, catnip, German chamomile, coriander, dill, lemon balm, yarrow, thyme, French tarragon. Wild plants such as fireweed, goldenrod, pasture sage, and wild bergamot are also being cultivated for their oil.

The distiller mounts on a 20-ft. trailer. A 4 hp propane steam boiler heats the plant material chamber which holds about 150 lbs. of woody material or 115 lbs. of fresh field herbs.

Operation of the unit requires a potable water supply since both the boiler and condenser need water to force steam through the plant material. Steam vaporizes the essential oils which then go through a water-

cooled condenser, to capture the essential oil and hydrosol. Most of the oils are lighter than water, so they collect at the top of a separator and are siphoned off. The remaining water is called a hydrosol. This retains some of the fragrance of the oil, much like herb tea.

Depending on the product, distillation times can range from 2 to 8 hrs.

It's possible to do a small distillation of as little as 10 lbs. but to maximize the efficiency of the unit, the group encourages people to have at least 100 lbs.

ANHAN members can use the mobile distiller for a small fee. One member, Heather Kehr, of Spruce Grove, Alta., is an aroma therapist and medicinal plant grower. In 2003, she decided to go ahead and build her own stationary distiller that's about three times the size of the mobile unit. Besides using it for her own production of essential oils, she custom distills for other producers.

Kehr also plans to put on educational demonstrations of the distilling process to agricultural tourists.

Kehr points out that small distillers are available on the internet for a couple thousand dollars, so it's possible for almost anyone to produce essential oil for their family and friends, if they want to.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Alberta Natural Health Agricultural Network, 4301 - 50 St., Leduc, Alta. T9E 7H3 (ph 780 986-0262; email: info@anhan.org; website: www.anhan.org) or Stony Plain Multicultural Centre, Heather Kehr, Box 2188, Stony Plain, Alta., Canada T7Z 1X7 (ph 780 963-2777; website: www.albertaherbaessentials.com).

Sell Your Animals Online

If you raise exotic animals and need a new way to sell them, you might want to check out Exotic Animal Auctions.

It's an internet-based auction site that lets you sell and buy all kinds of animals, semen straws and even livestock-related supplies and equipment. You can also list more conventional domestic animals at the site.

While registration for both buyers and sellers is free, the website charges the seller a fee of 5 percent of the purchase price for each item sold. Posting and uploading pictures is free.

The only personal information contained in the auction listings are the members username and zip code. Sheila Levesque, a website administrator, recommends sellers put their city and state in the item description so potential buyers can check on transportation issues, which are negotiated be-

tween the seller and buyer after the sale.

"When transporting animals every state has their own regulations on what types of animals can be brought into or transported through the state," she says, adding that there's a section about that in the Policies/User Agreement.

If a potential buyer has a question about the auction, it's publicly posted along with the seller's answer. Once the item sells, both are contacted so payment arrangements can be made.

Levesque personally handles any questions or problems. "All contact is on a personal, one-on-one level by me, a real human. We don't give any computer generated answers."

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Exotic Animal Auctions (email: servicecoordinator@exoticanimalauctions.net; website: www.exoticanimalauctions.net).

They Sell Shares Of Cows

How do you sell raw, unpasteurized milk legally when it's illegal to sell outright?

Mark and Debbie Apple, farmers near McCordsville, Ind., found a way to do it by selling shares in their grass-fed cows.

Their board, take care of, and milk "your" cows.

According to government and health regulators, unpasteurized milk is unsafe to drink. Yet those who disagree say pasteurization destroys beneficial vitamins and enzymes.

In most areas of the country, it's not legal to sell it. But there are no laws that say you can't drink the milk from your own cows.

The business of selling cows and shares works like this. Each cow sells for \$1,000 plus \$320 per month boarding fee which includes cow care, feeding and milking. The cow can be "split" into up to 20 shares - \$50 per share - in addition to each share's portion of the boarding fee (\$16). The Apples currently board 21 cows.

An annual \$20 non-refundable fee purchases a year's worth of plastic, single-use jugs.

"Each share constitutes approximately 1 gal. of milk each week while the milk lasts," Debbie says.

Those involved must pick up the milk at



The Apples split each cow into as many as 20 shares for people who want fresh, raw milk.

the farm or have someone else pick it up.

The Apples have a waiting list of 50 families. Once a cow becomes available, each person signs a contract for the boarding of the cow and receives a bill of sale.

The Indiana Cow Share Association, a group the Apples created of 150 families, oversees the business management.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, The Apple Family Farm, 3365 West State Rd. 234, McCordsville, Ind. 46055 (ph 317 335-3067; email: debbie@applefamilyfarm.com; website: www.applefamilyfarm.com).

"Finger Fortunes" is a corn maze game where stations are hidden in a corn maze. At each station, players color the tip of one of their fingers.



Additional Activities Boost Attendance At Corn Maze

In the last issue, we had a story about a company that designs corn mazes. If you already have one or are thinking of setting one up, you might want to check out Maize Quest's Discovery games.

The company has a catalog of games for on-farm use designed to boost attendance at on-farm attractions.

For example, "Boulder Dash" is a brand new game where contestants on two teams suit-up in helmets and pads to navigate an 8-ft. dia. "boulder" through a 60 by 180-ft. obstacle course arena with the goal being to get their boulder in the other team's "Boulder Cup." After going through the corn maze, it answers the question "what's next?"

The package includes maze plan, sign holders and two boulders. There's an initial purchase fee and an annual license fee.

"Finger Fortunes" is a corn maze game where stations are hidden in the maze and elsewhere on the farm. At each station, players color the tip of one of their fingers. When they have colored all 5 fingers on one hand, these colors make one of 120 different patterns. When the pattern is matched, a "fortune" can be awarded.

The approximately 15 to 20-min. game requires no staff; just a sign pointing visitors to the "Fortune Sign" and refreshments and merchandise. The package includes all needed signs and plexiglass station covers.

"The great thing about our line of maze



In "Boulder Dash", contestants on two teams push an 8-ft. dia. "boulder" through a 60 by 180-ft. obstacle course. products is their flexibility. You can use them almost anywhere," says Hugh McPherson, "The Maze Master."

The company also offers assistance with all aspects of designing a corn maze and public relations to grow attendance and profit.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Maize Quest, 251 Maple Lawn Rd., New Park, Penn. 17352 (ph 866 935-6738 ext 102 or 717 382-4878; website: www.CornMaze.com).