

Paintball: A New Opportunity For Profitable Rural Business

Joe Brandsma started a paintball business in rural northern Minnesota last year. And even though he lost five weekends due to heavy rain, business was brisk enough that he plans to open the 8 1/2-acre site again in the spring.

He says there are lots of opportunities with the popular game. Though it sounds dangerous, Brandsma says there are fewer injuries with it than with golf. "Paintball is getting huge, expanding almost 100 percent each year," says Brandsma. "It's the fastest growing industry in extreme sports."

His rural operation is an expansion of an indoor paintball arena that Brandsma and a partner operate in Brookings, S. Dak. He is bringing the same national certification, rules, safety considerations and insurance to his rural enterprise. He cautions against opening what he calls rogue fields.

"Landowners don't realize their homeowners' insurance doesn't cover liability from operating a paintball field," he says. "There are only four companies that insure paintball businesses."

Brandsma's insurance requires his players use goggles. His masks offer protection for the eyes, mouth, chin and ears and cover half way back on the head. "The safety equipment is regulated by OSHA and tested to withstand 300 ft./sec. paintballs. You can get the gear at a low cost - goggles for \$20, kneepads and others pieces in the \$20 range too. The cheapest line protects as well as the highest-price line."

He also uses only fresh paintballs, explaining that as paintballs sit on the shelf, they dry up and get harder.

Paintball guns range from \$60 to \$1,400, with professional guns running as high as



Joe Brandsma started his own paintball business. "It's the fastest growing industry in extreme sports," he says.

\$1,700. Brandsma charges \$10/day, \$20 for equipment rental and sells paintballs at 500 for \$20 or 2,000 for \$60.

All outside games are refereed from a raised platform to enforce safety rules and encourage a fun experience. Learning the rules and operating safely is key to success. Brandsma recommends attending the Paintball Technical Institute if a person is interested in establishing a paintball field.

"They teach you everything you need to know from gun technology to field management," he says. "It costs about \$2,000 to get fully certified."

Brandsma suggests there is no such thing as too much training or certification. He is certified to referee by multiple national professional paintball leagues. This allows him to run professional tournaments, which are increasing in number as the sport grows.

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He Converts Semi Trucks For Use On Farms

Jack Friesen at Load Line Manufacturing specializes in converting over-the-road trucks into farm work horses, reconditioning fleet trucks that he says still have a lot of life left in them.

Friesen and his staff sell several hundred units per year, and usually have close to 200 trucks on the yard at Winkler, Manitoba, at any time.

"Fleet trucks are well maintained and, when they come off lease, I negotiate to buy them from the operators. Then we recondition and convert them as needed, depending on what each customer wants. We can lengthen or shorten the frame, or make any other necessary adjustments," he says, noting that the refurbished trucks come with a limited-time warranty.

Some Load Line clients are custom haulers, but most are farmers who like the trucks because they are so economical. Friesen says his company sells trucks, complete with a box, for about one-third the price of a new truck.

"It gives guys the ability to own a larger truck, which makes it economical to haul products further afield, accessing more lucrative markets," Friesen explains. "Farmers don't generally put a lot of miles on their trucks overall, so these used units will last a long time. I also farm, myself, and my grain truck is one we converted at my shop."

The company also makes overseas sales to places like Russia, Mexico and Belize,



Jack Friesen specializes in converting over-the-road trucks into farm work-horses.



He and his staff sell several hundred reconditioned trucks per year. They usually have 200 trucks on the yard at any time, but the bulk of its customers are North American farmers.

Load Line Manufacturing was established in 1989 and has 20 bays in its shop for conversion work. In addition, the business builds truck boxes and has a retail parts and accessories store.

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Custom-built hayride wagon "is built to last and is more comfortable and safer than most of the hayride wagons you see," says Scott Bond.

"Built To Last" Hayride Wagon

Anyone who owns a "pick your own" orchard, Christmas tree farm, or other on-farm venture, will be interested in this new custom built hayride wagon that seats about 30 people.

"It's built to last and is more comfortable and safer than most of the hayride wagons you see," says Scott Bond, Dave's Equipment Sales, Stockton, N.J.

The 8 by 20-ft. wagon rides on an 8-ton running gear and has a steel bed with a pressure treated wooden floor. It has 3 1/2-ft. stake sides with wooden benches, and three steel steps equipped with hand rails on back. The bottom step is hinged and can be folded up out of the way and pinned in place.

"It's nicer and safer than sitting on hay bales and is also easier to get on and off, with no need for a permanent step. The wagon can be custom built to any size," says Bond.

Sells for about \$4,000.



Wagon has three steel steps with hand rails on back. Bottom step is hinged and can be folded up out of the way.

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"It works great for removing rocks from topsoil that I scrape off my land," says Don Ickes about his home-built, portable topsoil screener.

Low-Cost, Portable Topsoil Screener

Don Ickes, Osterburg, Penn., used mostly scrap metal to build a low-cost, portable topsoil screener.

"It works great for removing rocks from topsoil that I scrape off my land. In the past I stockpiled the soil, but I couldn't sell it for landscaping purposes because there were too many rocks in it," says Ickes.

The unit measures 9 ft. high, 9 ft. wide and 6 ft. deep and is supported by 6-in. I-beam posts and 3 by 5-in. angle iron. It's open on one side with the other three sides made from fiberglass panels. A skid steer loader is used to dump dirt onto a metal screen set at an angle on top of the unit. Dirt falls through the screen and forms a pile under it, while rocks slide down off the screen and into another pile.

He uses a skid loader to move the unit.

"It really works good. I use it on a public

airport that I designed specifically for ultralight aircraft," says Ickes. "The airport is carved out of some woods, and I've enlarged it several times. When I do that I often scrape off topsoil that's full of rocks and debris. I built it last summer, and it has already paid for itself in the first couple of topsoil loads that I was able to sell. This year I plan to process about 300 tons of topsoil with rocks in it. My total cost to build it was about \$300.

"Even though the screen has 3/4-in. dia. holes in it, it won't remove rocks more than a half inch in diameter. That's because the screen is set at an angle, which effectively reduces the size of the holes."

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