

Money-Making Ideas To Boost Farm Income

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.



Proctor & Gamble, a prospective buyer of Cuphea, is helping to fund research into varieties that won't shatter during harvest.

Big Demand Exists For Alternative Crop

Unlike corn, soybeans and other conventional crops, most alternative crops don't have much of a market. But Cuphea (koo-FEE-ah), a plant native to North America that's also called the "cigar" or "firecracker" flower, has big demand already in place. Growers just need to boost yields and they'll have all the buyers they need.

"Detergent and soap makers are looking for a dependable domestic supply of loric acid, which they now get from palm and coconut oils," says Win Phippen, associate professor, Western Illinois University, Macomb, Ill. "Even meeting 50 percent of the U.S. demand would require 8 million acres of Cuphea."

The problem is that Cuphea is a nondeterminate plant whose seed shatters. Phippen and others are working to develop a variety that doesn't shatter when ripe and stops blossoming in favor of seed development.

Phippen is part of a team that includes USDA researchers at Peoria, Ill., Morris, Minn., and Athens, Ga. Technology Crops International is coordinating grower contracts and commercialization. Most of the early funding has been from Proctor & Gamble, a prospective buyer of loric acid.

Herbicides for weed control have been identified, and the small seed can be planted with standard row crop planters and harvested with conventional combines. The only adaptation needed is to modify grain-drying bins with canola floor panels to handle the small seed size.

Although the plant is native to the South, the leading candidate for a successful variety is best adapted to the upper Midwest, roughly north of Missouri. Less than 500



There's big demand for Cuphea because it contains loric acid, an ingredient in detergents and other soaps.

acres are now under contract with growers in Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota.

Current varieties have high yields, but lose most of it at harvest. To reduce loss, they are harvested at high moisture levels (up to 40 percent) to prevent shattering and then dried down as low as 8 percent for long-term storage. If shattering can be controlled, growers could use dry down chemicals or swathing to get moisture down to 20 percent at harvest.

"On our research plots, we are harvesting about 400 lbs. per acre," says Phippen. "To be economically competitive with corn and soybeans, we need to be harvesting 800 lbs. per acre."

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Bob and Jeannette Kappers deliver milk door-to-door, sell to stores, and operate an on-farm store that runs on trust.

These Dairy Farmers Sell Their Own Milk

By Jim Ruen, Contributing Editor

Residents of Chatfield, Minn., population 2,275, can get fresh milk in glass bottles delivered right to their door by dairy farmers Bob and Jeannette Kappers. The Kappers also sell their milk at local stores and at an on-farm store that is self-service from 6 a.m. to 8 p.m. every day.

"The store is our best marketing effort of all," says Jeannette. "We stock it with milk priced at \$1.75 per half gallon and chocolate for \$2.50. We also offer Land O' Lakes butter and frozen meat processed at a USDA inspected facility."

The farm store runs on trust. Prices for products are listed, and people leave the money.

Getting the Big Red Barn Milk business started required lots of trust and community support, say both Bob and Jeannette. They credit the local bank, food market managers, and friends and neighbors for encouraging them. One of their biggest supporters has been their dairy co-op.

"We use about half the milk produced by our 35-cow herd," says Bob. "The rest goes to Land O' Lakes."

"And they buy our extra cream, which we aren't selling right now, and that takes a lot of extra work on their part," says Jeannette. "Our field man has been really helpful."

Ironically, the farm they bought about 15 years ago had the remains of a bottling plant on it. After years of just milking cows, Bob decided to pursue his dream of direct marketing his milk. They stripped the old plant down to its studs. Bob turned to sources for dairy equipment that he had filed away over the years.

"I started calling," he says. "Some of the equipment came from Texas, but most of it came from Ohio."

"Bob has learned how to fix things and how things have to be timed," says Jeannette. "The cream separator alone has 93 parts, and it is cleaned twice before every use."

One of the biggest challenges was getting

up to state dairy processing standards. Here, too, their co-op field man was a lot of help. Another challenge was learning how to run the used equipment. With no business plan, marketing studies or milk processing experience to go by, Bob and Jeannette again relied on friends and relatives as they learned to process the milk.

"We had a list of tasters as we developed our products, especially the chocolate milk," recalls Jeannette. "They have all signed up for when we expand to ice cream."

So far marketing has been mostly word of mouth with limited taste sampling at local stores and sales at a local farmers' market. A dairy advisory team consisting of University of Minnesota Extension specialists, their banker, and others, advise them on new marketing efforts.

With a year and a half under their belt, the Kappers have learned plenty. One of their biggest surprises was the cost of glass bottles, which has gone up, well over the \$1.50 deposit they charge.

"I would tell anybody starting out to buy more than they think they'll need when they start," says Jeannette. "Once you start, it is hard to raise the bottle deposit."

One surprise to the Kappers and their customers has been the growth in sales of their skim milk. Jeannette notes that most people who first buy 1 percent switch over to the skim that is not homogenized.

This FARM SHOW writer verifies that the skim has a better mouthfeel and tastes richer than commercial skim milk. The chocolate also tastes fresher and cleaner, perhaps due to the real sugar and high quality cocoa they use instead of corn syrup common with most chocolate milk on the market.

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He Sells Farm Produce Direct To Restaurants

"What's nice about operating the way I do is that you can sell your produce before it's even harvested," says Bill Poynton, a former chef and restaurant manager turned full-time gardener. "You don't ever have to stand at a farmer's market for hours."

After 15 years in the restaurant business, he bought a 21-acre farm near Northfield, Minn. After he planted his first crop of peppers, garlic, potatoes, onions, broccoli, tomatoes, watermelons and other melons, he

learned he had missed the deadline to book a booth at a large nearby farmers market. That left him with a lot of produce and no buyers.

"I literally went knocking on restaurant doors," he says. "Surprisingly, nobody turned me away and I sold everything."

He says the chefs were very receptive to talking to him about his produce and he learned that others are selling direct, too.

Poynton says pricing can be tricky and that it's a learning experience. "I literally pulled

numbers out of the air," he admits. "Nobody questioned my prices which told me they were too low."

This year, he plans to only sell directly to restaurants.

He says chefs want organic produce that's clean. "Leave the dirt on the farm," he says. "These chefs are picky."

During the winter, he sent out mini surveys to learn what chefs are looking for. He's also working with members of the Sustainable

Farming Association of Minnesota which is working to expand produce available to restaurants.

Poynton says some chefs take pride in serving locally grown produce. "Some even put the farm names on the menu and it's great seeing that."

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