



Members of Bethel Christian Reformed Church in Sioux Center, Iowa raise money for the church's education fund by covering silage piles with plastic tarps and tires for area farmers, in exchange for a donation. In 2013 the project raised more than \$51,000.

By Lorn Manthey, Contributing Editor

## Church Crews Raise Money Covering Silage Stacks

"Covering silage piles is a lot of hard work, but it has been a great way to get to know other church members, and we've definitely raised a lot of money for our Christian Education committee," says Wade Vanden Berg, a member of Bethel Christian Reformed Church, Sioux Center, Iowa.

Vanden Berg heads up a fundraiser subcommittee that coordinates covering silage piles with plastic tarps and tires for

area farmers in exchange for a donation to the church's education fund. In 2013, covering silage piles helped raise more than \$51,000. "We've got a lot of cattle feeders and dairies in the area, so there are many silage piles that need covering," Vanden Berg says.

The farmer/customer is responsible for supplying the tarp, tires and machinery. The church provides the manpower, which varies from 6 people for a small pile up to 100 workers for a really big pile. "It takes 80 to 100 workers 4 hrs. to cover a 70,000-ton pile of silage, which is the largest job we've tackled," he says. The size of the crew is determined by the dimension of the pile and the number of tons in the pile.

Crews are organized via email using addresses from the church newsletter mailing list. Crews consist of men, women and youth, married and singles, old and young. Volunteers are advised to wear jeans, long-sleeved shirts, gloves and tennis shoes or work boots.

New business comes mostly through



The size of the crew varies from 6 people for a small silage pile up to 100 workers for a really big pile.

word-of-mouth among farmer-customers, custom silage-cutting operators, and local veterinarians. Most piles are located within 25 miles of the church, but crews have covered piles as far as 60 miles away. Suggested donation amounts are based on silage-pile volume. A higher rate is charged for piles that require double tarping, which provides better weather protection, but is also more labor intensive. "Most customers pay

the suggested amount, or even more than the suggested amount," Vanden Berg says. "In the rare instance where a farmer doesn't pay, we move him to the bottom of the list for next year."

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## Black Asian Chickens Have No White Meat

When Ayam Cemani chicken breeders say their birds have dark meat, they mean it. The native Indonesian breed is black to the bone - including all the meat, organs and even their bone marrow. But, at \$199/chick, you won't find many on the dinner table just yet.

Jenny Taylor is farm manager for Greenfire Farms, Midway, Fla., which raises a variety of unusual and rare poultry breeds. She says the breed is costly because of the red tape and expense importing them. The all-black chickens come from a 500-year-old Asian breed. Because of an import ban from that region, North American breeders such as Greenfire Farms import from certified breeders in EU countries.

"Despite their hypnotic, otherworldly beauty, Ayam Cemani are usually hardy, low maintenance, and by disposition easy to handle," Taylor says. "We were asked by *New York* magazine to supply an Ayam Cemani model for their holiday gifts issue, and after we flew him to New York, our rooster patiently allowed himself to be draped with million-dollar jewelry and trussed with a red ribbon while he was photographed under bright lights."

The chickens do well in confinement or backyard runs for owners from Maine to Florida, she adds. They thrive on 16 percent layer pellets and have the same water and housing requirements as other chickens.

Medium size with a narrow frame and small breast, they are more for showmanship than meat. They also produce 80 cream-colored eggs each year, which can be hatched and sold.

Though Greenfire Farms only breeds the blackest birds, they can't guarantee that all offspring will have the same amount of black pigment.

Taylor notes she has never dressed an Ayam Cemani, but when a coyote killed one, she cut the chicken open. Everything was black, she



The All-black Ayam Cemani breed is native to Indonesia. A medium-sized bird with a narrow frame and small breast, they're more suited for showmanship than as producers of meat or eggs.



says, but adds it's a myth that the blood and feces are also black.

In the future, however, the black chickens may be dressed and served at some high-end restaurants.

"A lot of people are interested in them for their culinary value," Taylor says.

For poultry enthusiasts interested in unusual birds, she notes that Greenfire Farms has another black breed. The Swedish Black Hen is more adopted for colder climates and has more red in the wattles, but is also black to the bone. Chicks sell for \$99/each and adult pairs sell for \$700.

For details about them and other varieties raised at the "boutique hatchery," check out their website.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Greenfire Farms, P.O. Box 676, Midway, Fla. 32343 (ph 850 570-3679; www.greenfirefarms.com).

