

Reindeer Bring Customers To Illinois Farm

Reindeer really do fly, says Julie Hardy, after transporting a dozen Alaskan reindeer to Illinois in a Boeing 747.

She and her husband, Mark, say the reindeer have created a lot of excitement at their Rantoul, Ill., farm which also features a traditional 10-acre corn maze, a pumpkin cannon, and a Wild West Saloon that serves up chuck wagon dinners.

“Our advice to anyone trying this is don’t copy the neighbors. Be more unique than anybody in the area,” Julie Hardy says. “Our buildings are restored 100-year-old barns; nothing is cookie cutter.”

The Hardys developed their business over 19 years, investing and adding activities and developing markets.

They started with a couple of regionally purchased reindeer before traveling to Alaska and purchasing a dozen reindeer (domesticated caribou). The animals were loaded into individual crates and forklifted into the cargo section of the 747 airplane. Thirteen hours later they arrived in Illinois.

“They are obnoxiously friendly and will kiss you for a cookie,” Hardy says.

The reindeer attracted local and national media attention and drew visitors from

Chicago, St. Louis and Indianapolis. The Hardys don’t charge admission to their farm, but charge fees for specific activities such as the maze, hayrides, reindeer tours, paintball gallery and pedal race carts.

Group packages are also popular, Hardy says. One example - the “Little Buckaroo” - includes a reindeer tour, hayride, cookies and juice and a pumpkin for \$8/each for young children. Large groups get reduced rates.

“We marketed outside our area to become a destination,” Hardy says. She connected with tour people to set up bus tours.

“We made the banquet hall a Wild West saloon. Tour people want a unique experience so we came up with a chuck wagon dinner - something you don’t find in the Midwest,” she explains. She hires local entertainers to add to the Wild West theme, and costumes are available for guests.

Hardy’s Reindeer Ranch is seasonal, from August-December, but also offers group bookings by reservation year round.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Mark and Julie Hardy, Hardy’s Reindeer Ranch, 1356 Co. Rd. 2900 N., Rantoul, Ill. 61866 (ph 217 893-3407; www.reindeerranch.com).



A dozen Alaskan reindeer have created a lot of excitement at Julie and Mark Hardy’s Illinois farm. It also features a 10-acre corn maze, a pumpkin cannon, and a Wild West Saloon that serves up chuck wagon dinners.

Guinea Pigs Business Takes Off

Guinea pigs make great pets, but they also produce a nice income sideline for Mose Jr. and Barbie Zook. Their 500-head operation got its start with 3 adults and 9 young pigs.

“We needed some added income when we got married,” explains Zook. “A year later we had 150 head.”

Zook feeds his guinea pigs barley sprouts over dry hay, plus the barley water from his hand-built sprouting system.

“The coarse hay helps balance out the protein and moisture in the sprouts,” says Zook. “When we switched to sprouts and sprout water, we quit supplemental vitamins and minerals and saw a 15 percent increase in production.”

Zook works with a broker who distributes his guinea pigs to pet stores. Zook says a standard breeding pair sells for about \$25. Specialty breeds can go as high as \$150 for

a pair.

“We raise different colors and breeds, including tricolor with white stripes in front, deep chocolate, and various shades of tan, black and gray,” says Zook. “We have long-haired breeds, as well as a breed called the Teddy with a rough coat that looks like it has a Teddy Boy hairstyle.”

Zook says the long-haired breeds sell for \$150 for a pair, while the Teddys sell for \$110. He is currently working with another breeder on a new long-haired line that he plans to market for around \$175 per pair.

“The guinea pigs are kept in pens with about 9 females and 1 male per pen,” says Zook. “We average about 9 babies per day.”

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Guinea pigs produce a nice income sideline for Mose and Barbie Zook. They work with a broker who distributes their guinea pigs to pet stores.

“Wireless” Traps Make Sideline Business More Efficient

With wireless trap technology it’s a lot easier to start a sideline pest animal control business. TrapSmart, developed by Tom Watson and Jim Burgio, sends a message to a phone or computer when an animal is caught.

The cost of fuel and time spent checking traps is what inspired Watson to come up with the idea. “Our system is totally wireless,” Watson explains. A sensor connects to the trap with a lanyard clip so that when an animal is caught it pulls the clip out of the sensor to trigger the alert message.

The technology makes it possible to reduce the time animals are in the traps and has been approved by several states where trappers are required to check traps every 24 hrs.

The basic system starts at \$495 for a control unit and sensor. Monthly service plans are extra. Besides cellular plans, TrapSmart offers a satellite option for those

living in areas with poor cellular coverage.

For pros covering a large area with multiple traps, TrapSmart Deluxe Plus uses cellular and satellite with GPS to show the exact location of each trap.

Watson says he has a wide range of customers, from professionals who trap around airports, warehouses, or residential areas, to landowners who need to trap feral pigs or other wild animals.

Alerts mean less time and energy spent checking empty traps so the trapper can get other work done. The alerts can also be customized to send reminder messages if you don’t respond immediately.

The TrapSmart website includes more details about the systems.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, TrapSmart, 20 Curtis Drive, Vernon, N.J. 07462 (ph 973 907-0280; www.trapsmart.com; info@trapsmart.com).



Using wireless technology, TrapSmart sends a message to a phone or computer when an animal is caught.

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