

## Family Of “Hustlers” Makes Living On 44-Acre Farm

In 1997 Craig Sirna and his family decided it was time to move from the city to a farm. Craig, his wife Anne Marie and their 3 children bought a 44-acre wooded farm site and began raising their own food. They bought a steer, some chickens, planted a large garden and some hay. The children joined 4-H and showed turkeys, chickens and steers. Craig and Anne Marie started a roadside stand to market sweet corn, pumpkins, gourds and vegetables.

Sirna says their farm became an entirely different lifestyle after he'd spent 34 years as a full-time police officer. “At times I wish we'd moved out here long before we did,” he says. The Sirna's farm market is open seasonally and they've recently expanded into hydroponic greenhouses. One of them houses strawberries and the other is used for raising produce and greens. Last year they built 4 high tunnel greenhouses that they hope will expand the

growing season for some of their crops.

“Without the help of my wife and children none of these things would've been possible,” Sirna says. “We've grown not only in size, but in gaining a great respect for farmers and what they do for us.” The Sirna's children Anthony (30), Kristin (29) and Kaitlyn (22) all have a role in the family business. The farm produces its own maple syrup from 314 taps, which netted 80 gal. last year. They have 5 beehives that produce honey and stock locally produced wine, canned goods, vegetables and fruits.

In 2013, the family jumped at a chance to buy a local pizzeria, which is just a few miles from their farm. Kaitlyn runs the day-to-day operations with assistance from Anne Marie, who makes pizza sauce every day from vegetables they grow on their farm. Several pizzas are topped with Sirna's homemade Italian sausage and nitrate-free bacon. They always try to use as many of their own and

other locally grown products as possible on their pizza.

The Sirnas also have a small herd of purebred Angus cattle, a Texas longhorn steer, a buffalo, and free-range chickens that produce several dozen brown eggs a day. Their farm store now sells more than 40 seasonal fresh vegetables along with certified Angus beef, sausages, Amish cheese products and locally produced jams, jellies, grains, spices and specialty foods.

Sirna says the whole transition and growth of the market has been quite a ride from humble beginnings 17 years ago. They participate in many local events to promote their business, have an active website, and use regular posts on social media to promote their business.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Sirna's Farm and Market, 19009 Ravenna Rd., Auburn, Ohio 44023 (ph 440 834-0696; [www.sirnasfarm.com](http://www.sirnasfarm.com)).



In 1997 Craig Sirna and his family moved from the city to the farm. Now they make a living on 44 acres.

## “New” Fruit Catching On Fast

If you are looking for a new “tropical” fruit to grow this year, check out the pawpaw. It's hardly a new fruit. Native to the U.S., it sustained members of the Lewis and Clark expedition through Missouri as well as scores of homesteaders. Now with decades of breeding, the native pawpaw is bigger and better than ever and gaining buzz among foodies, market growers and home gardeners.

“It's one of our fastest growing (in popularity) specialty crops,” says Kim Young, of Forrest Keeling Nursery. The Elsberry, Mo., nursery grows native plants for restoration and wetlands, as well as specialty crops such as pawpaw, chestnut and Aronia (chokeberry).

“Our method of growing allows for great transplant success,” Young says, noting pawpaw is among trees difficult to transplant. “We developed a patented growing process, the Root Production

Method®, that creates a very fibrous root system that allows the plant to take up water and nutrients for accelerated growth in the first year and for bigger harvests,” Young says.

The process includes air-root pruning, and special nutrition and soil.

Home gardeners and farmers market growers love the big yellow fruit from the pawpaw, described as tasting like creamy mango or a cross between an apple and banana. It's high in antioxidants, and researchers are evaluating its other nutrients.

Pawpaws have 2-in. maroon blossoms, and the fruit ripens over a month between August and October, depending on the region. With only a shelf life of a couple of days (three weeks refrigerated) it is used as a fresh fruit that varies from 3 to 6 in. long and from 5 to 16 oz.

Young notes that Neal Peterson (after three decades of research) developed the six

pawpaw varieties they sell. Suitable for Zones 5 to 9 (sometimes 4), two varieties of pawpaws should be planted to pollinate. Trees can bear fruit as early as the second year.

Young adds that chestnut hybrids are also growing in popularity, especially in Michigan. The fruit inside the spiny shell is used in stuffing and breads and is gluten-free.

Other Forrest Keeling specialty crop plants/trees include persimmons, elderberry, Aronia, pecans and walnuts. Homeowners can purchase them at the Forrest Keeling's garden center or through the website, [www.g2gardens.com](http://www.g2gardens.com).

Wholesalers should go to the Forrest Keeling nursery website.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Forrest Keeling Nursery, 88 Forrest Keeling Lane,



“After decades of breeding, the native pawpaw is bigger and better than ever and fast growing in popularity,” says Kim Young of Forrest Keeling Nursery.

Elsberry, Mo. 63343 (ph 800 356-2401; [www.fknursery.com](http://www.fknursery.com)).

## Ohio “Picker” Buys Bags And Other Rural Treasures

If you have stacks of old burlap, cloth, or seed corn bags, Aric Diehl would love to hear from you. The Defiance, Ohio, entrepreneur makes his living as a “picker.” He buys bags, signs, farm advertising manuals and other unique agriculture items and then sells them at antique shows and on internet sites such as Craigslist and eBay.

“I like to buy old interesting things that have a story,” Diehl says.

He explains he grew up collecting beer memorabilia, because his family owned a brewery from 1870 to 1955 and a milk canning plant for 80 plus years. After earning a master's degree in education –and with his wife's blessing – instead of teaching, he returned to his collecting ways and became a professional picker.

“I look for ‘non-traditional antiques,’” he explains. “I like tools farmers made – Frankenstein tools with an ag-folk art element.” For example, a favorite piece is a grain elevator a farmer made in the 50's out of porcelain tire signs.

Diehl's office is a restored one-room schoolhouse. He stores his treasures in a 40 by 50-ft. workshop and takes photos of individual items to post on the internet.

“I ended 2014 with over 5,500 bags

purchased,” Diehl says, noting that includes a couple big volume buys of 1,200 burlap potato bags and more than 1,000 coffee bags. “I'm looking for quantities of bags, 50 to 1,000. There are still granaries or elevators that may have them in the attic or laying around.”

He's also interested in unusual bags, such as a “Pigeon Grit” bag he purchased recently. Depending on rarity and quality, he pays anywhere from 50 cents to \$50 apiece, depending on the bag.

Diehl “picks” mostly in Ohio, Indiana and Michigan, but will travel to purchase large volumes of bags or other items that attract his curiosity. He runs some local ads, but admits most of his leads come from sellers who he has treated fairly in the past.

Many sellers are happy to sell bags rather than take them to the landfill – or burn them as one potato bag owner had already done with more than 3,000 bags.

Diehl invites collectors or people with bags or other unusual items to email or call for more information.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Aric Diehl, 10765 Market St., Defiance, Ohio 43512 (ph 419 439-1328; [rustediehls@gmail.com](mailto:rustediehls@gmail.com)).



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