

Barn's Hayloft Mounted On Top Of Country Home

Greg Paurus mounted the hayloft from an old barn on top of the house where he and his 12 siblings were born to make a unique 2,500 sq. ft. "cabin" for family reunions and to rent out to crafters and quilters. "The Home Place Retreat" includes a large open workroom, beds for 10 people, and all the amenities to make guests feel at home.

The old Sarkela barn was well known in Sebeka, Minn., as a holding barn for cattle on their way to market in St. Paul. Located on the edge of the town, it needed to be removed when a new American Legion building was built.

The bottom level of the barn was in poor condition, but Paurus figured he could save the 20 by 22-ft. loft area. He braced the loft, parked a hay wagon inside the barn, and

hired two payload operators to hold up each end of the building while he cut the loft off the barn with a chainsaw. The walls fell to the side and the payloaders lowered the loft onto the wagon.

Paurus pulled it with his tractor five miles to its new home early on a Sunday morning. His biggest concern was not to hit highline wires.

Back on the farm, he hired someone to block the loft up just over 8 ft. high on a foundation he had ready. He built the first story, then lowered the loft in place.

"What made the loft unique is that the rafters were rounded. They used five 1-in. boards and wet them to bend them," Paurus says.

He would have liked to keep the rafters



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exposed, but some were uneven, so he covered them with pine boards repurposed from another home remodeling project.

The loft adds character, however, with arched walls on the second floor and exposed joists on the kitchen ceiling. Because the joists had been whitewashed, Paurus decided

cleaning and painting them white was the best choice for finishing them.

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Business Is Booming For Heirloom Beans

Steve Sando knows a lot about beans, especially rare heirloom beans. He eats them frequently, writes about them, and grows them to sell at his store and on the internet.

"I now have 25 varieties that are grown here in California and 10 that are grown for us in Mexico by small farmers there," says Sando. "I try to grow two years worth of beans at a time, but sales have been so good that we run out of favorites from year to year."

Sando says that all it takes is a taste to get hooked. That's what happened when he tried his first heirloom bean, the Rio Zape. He's been spreading the word ever since and says the message is well received.

"Once people get a taste, they get excited and begin to treat different beans like different wines," says Sando. "When I grew my first Rio Zapes, I didn't know what to expect. They were similar to the pinto beans I liked, but there was so much more going on. Hints of chocolate and coffee mixed with an earthy texture."

Sando sent FARM SHOW a few pounds of his favorite beans to try, along with suggested recipes. This writer compared

Sando's black beans with commercial black beans purchased at a local co-op. Sando's Midnight black beans were thinner skinned, cooked up more tender and had superior flavor.

Sando started out growing his own beans in his vegetable garden and expanded from there as sales grew. Today he has 8 growers, mostly in the Central Valley of California, but also in Oregon, Washington and New Mexico. He even has a grower in Poland.

"We give them the seed and then buy back everything at the end of the season," he says. "The yields are not as good as conventional dry beans, but you get more per pound."

When he started out, Sando promoted his beans to area chefs, and their interest trickled down to their customers. Growth in sales has been by word of mouth and social media including Sando's blog, Facebook, Twitter and other efforts. Internet sales now account for 70 percent of sales.

"When I started, I was the loneliest guy at the farmer's market," says Sando. "Now people post pictures of themselves opening a box of our beans."

As new customers are added to the list, Sando adds growers from different areas. He



Steve Sando grows and sells rare heirloom beans at his store and on the internet. "Once people get a taste, they get excited and begin to treat different beans like different wines," he says. Photos show Santa Maria Piquito (left) and Vaquero beans.

notes that some beans taste best grown on the coast of California, while others taste best grown in the Central Valley. The Mexican beans do best in the mountains where they were developed.

"I'm always looking for new growers, but even if they don't grow for us, the more people who do a good job growing and promoting heirloom beans, the better," says Sando. "I love talking to people and encouraging 'agripreneurs.' I would love for American food to be even better."

Sando has written books devoted to his love for heirloom beans: "The Rancho Gordo Heirloom Bean Grower's Guide," "Heirloom Beans" and "Supper at Rancho Gordo."

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Hungarian Sheep Have Amazing Horns

The spiraling horns of Racka sheep are like no other domesticated sheep, growing up to 2 ft. long. The once rare breed is recovering in its native Hungary, but is just getting started in the U.S. Tom and Nancy Richardson believe they have the biggest herd in the U.S., although they have no full-blood Rackas.

"As a business, we are at the ground floor, just taking the first steps," says Tom Richardson, Mossy Springs Ranch. "When we lambed in 2015, we had 82 percent pure Rackas for the first time. We started with a ram lamb that was half Racka and bred it to other horned breeds in 2008. By 2010, we had 8 ewes that we artificially inseminated with pure-blood Racka semen. Their lambs were then 62 percent Racka."

The problem for the Richardsons is their source of Racka bloodlines is limited to straws of semen and selective A.I. A single straw costs \$75 from Super Sire Ltd. Breeders like the Richardsons slowly increase the percentage of desired

bloodlines.

"When we started, we used horn stock of several breeds to expand the genetic base," says Richardson. "We are trying to select for the Racka genotype."

Rackas were originally bred for wool, meat and abundant milk. Ewes average around 88 lbs. and rams around 132 lbs. The standard for ram horns in the Hungarian Racka Registry is a 20-in. minimum. The standard for ewes is 12 to 15 in. In the pure-blood animals, the corkscrew horns go almost straight up from each side of the head. On the Richardson's animals they protrude to the side.

"We keep our rams in individual pens to prevent fighting, which could chip their horns," says Richardson. "I've learned why the mothers have horns, too. They can protect themselves, and they will turn on you if you go for the babies."

Racka wool is described as long and coarse, cream colored to brown or black and an ideal crimp and softness for hand spinners. The Hungarian breed registry requires rams

produce at least 6 1/2 lbs. of wool.

Richardson has found that even those lambs that don't have the desired Racka features have value as breeding stock. He notes that they are very good mothers and even the ewe lambs produce more milk.

"Racka lambs are very strong," he says. "We had our vet out to pull a lamb, which he set aside, saying it wouldn't make it. Then he pulled its twin and said it wouldn't make it either. It turned out that they both did, but the ewe didn't."

The Richardsons aren't selling breeding stock at this point. When they do sell off low percentage Rackas, they are sold through an exotic auction service in Macon, Mo.

"We will send out samples of the wool if buyers are interested," says Richardson. "We also will breed a Racka with one of our other sheep breeds to a customer's order. However, we never invite visitors to our farm."

Richardson is looking for partnering breeders on the East and West Coasts as a way of protecting the Rackas he has developed.



Racka sheep have spiraling horns that grow up to 2 ft. long. The once rare breed is just getting started in the U.S.

"We are looking for breeders with certain criteria to work with."

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