

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.

She Grows Her Own Cloth Fiber

Raven Ranson makes yarn from plant fibers she grows herself. Even though she lives near Victoria on Vancouver Island, in British Columbia, her efforts have even included cotton. However, flax better fits her climate.

"I really like yarn and growing things, so I decided to combine my interests," says Ranson.

The do-it-her-selver encourages people to give it a try like she has. With the flax, she started with a 1-gal. pot of dirt and a pinch of seed.

"I didn't have fiber flaxseed, so I just used flaxseed from the supermarket," says Ranson. "It worked fine. Planted in my garden, I can get enough flax from a 3 by 3-ft. plot to make yarn for a towel."

Ranson's just try it attitude includes developing her own variety of flax and extends to timing. "I tried planting it at various times, and it was very forgiving. Just plant it, wait 2 to 3 months and harvest."

She is proud of breaking lots of rules, finding that sometimes the wrong way is a better way.

Turning flax into yarn requires the aid of microbes in a process called retting to get rid of the glue that holds the fibers in the stem. When sufficiently retted, the stems are dried and smashed to break loose the fibers. Once combed and worked, the fibers can be spun into yarn for weaving.

"Some people find it to be hard work, but working with my sheep and dealing with a ram is a lot more work," says Ranson.

She describes the process in her book, *Homegrown Linen: Transforming Flaxseed into Fibre*. Due to be published in January, the book covers growing flax in various conditions, creating your own flax fiber variety, and processing. It also covers tools, tips and tricks, as well as other uses for flax.

What it doesn't cover is her work with other fibers such as cotton. Here, too, she broke lots of rules, starting with her seed and the idea that it could be grown so far north.



Raven Ranson converts home-grown flax into yarn.



"I used seeds from a floral display my first time. Then I found seeds at Etsy.com," says Ranson. "Finally, I discovered them in the Baker Creek Seed catalog."

Ranson grows colored cotton in shades of brown, green and white, growing them in an 8 by 10-ft. greenhouse. One crop of cotton in that space produces enough fiber to weave about 6 towels. She reports getting a crop 3 out of 5 years as she experiments with growing it.

"One thing I am trying to do with the book is to encourage people to experiment," says Ranson. "Just take a bucket or a plot and do half one way and half another. See what results."

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Millerville Co-op Creamery still handcrafts butter, pressing it into 90-lb. stainless steel boxes and then cutting it into 1-lb. blocks.

Small Batch Butter Sells In Big Batches

Millerville Co-op Creamery's butter may be crafted in small batches, but it often sells in big batches. The Minnesota co-op has been in business since 1929. Today, they are one of the only original co-op creameries still handcrafting butter.

"We have people stop in and buy 75 to 100 lbs. at a time," says Diedre Hubbard, Millerville Co-op Creamery.

The creamery no longer handles milk. "Too many of our members got out of dairy," explains Hubbard. "However, they want us to keep making butter, which we do twice a month."

Cream purchased from Land O'Lakes is pasteurized the first day using an old steam boiler. Hubbard oversees the 3-day process. Mark Thoennes has been making the butter for the past 40 years with equipment in use even longer.

"Some of the equipment would probably be considered antique, but I don't know how different it is from a newer churn," says Hubbard. "There is no one to come in and do repairs, so we have to figure things out when a problem occurs. We look for old equipment elsewhere that we can swap out for parts."

Once the milk has cooled overnight, the cream is pumped into the churn and churned for up to an hour with Thoennes watching for little balls of butter to appear. When the balls reach sufficient size, the butter is drained and salted before being pressed into 90-lb.

stainless steel boxes. The butter is carefully packed in by hand to avoid air pockets.

On the third day, the butter is cut into 1-lb. blocks, wrapped and boxed. It is distributed to several area stores, including the Millerville liquor store, perhaps the only liquor store around that carries butter. About half the butter is sold from the creamery store.

"We have many great customers who support us," says Hubbard. "We make and sell around 25,000 lbs. a year at \$5 per box."

Hubbard notes that while the butter can be shipped, she discourages it. "It is very expensive to ship, so we try not to," she says.

The town celebrates its butter at Millerville Butter Days. There and at the local Douglas County Fair, pounds of butter are available for a carving contest. Hubbard says winners of the contests get to keep the butter.

While much remains unchanged, one thing is getting an update. "We are getting a new box," says Hubbard. "It is still yellow, just more modern looking."

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They're Making Milkweeds A New Cash Crop

A group of farmers in Quebec and the far northeast U.S., organized under the name Monark Cooperative, are growing milkweeds as a new income-producing crop. Nathalie Leonard leads the group and farms with her brother in Lac-du-Cerf, Quebec. Her family has about 60 acres dedicated to milkweeds, which were planted in the spring of 2016. She's harvesting the first seed pods this fall. Their farm also grows grains and hay, has U-pick strawberry and blueberry fields, a cow-calf operation, cabin rentals on a lake, and a bakery that turns their berries into desserts.

Leonard says that even though milkweeds are a vigorous native plant in the wild that

can thrive in rough soil and dry conditions, in a farm field they need a specific pH and definitely fare better if fertilized. After the plants are established, each rhizome creates 5 new rhizomes a year. Pod production starts after the 2nd year, and beyond the 3rd and 4th year it's better. Leonard says a crop should yield pods for 10 years on the same field.

On Leonard's farm they're experimenting with management and harvesting practices. They're harvesting pods by hand and with a special harvester that isn't quite working like they want it to yet.

Because milkweeds are non-GMO, Leonard says they fit their operation perfectly. In addition to being the sole host for monarch butterfly eggs and benefiting

many other insects, there's a market for milkweed seed and fiber. Milkweed fiber has been used as an oil absorbing agent as well as insulation for jackets and vests. Because it's non-allergenic, the fiber might also find its way into pillows, mattresses and toy stuffing.

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Nathalie Leonard leads a group of Quebec farmers who are growing milkweeds as an income-producing crop.

