

They Grow Sweet Potatoes In Canada

After a hectic, lesson-filled year, Stephanie Lessner and her family now know it's possible to grow sweet potatoes successfully on their Alberta farm. They also sell slips to other producers interested in growing them as a diversified crop. The family will take preorders for the slips beginning January 2022.

The 2,500 acres of irrigated grain land, 10,000 acres of native pasture and 1,000 cow-calf pairs keep the men busy. But the women in the family decided they could diversify by adding a greenhouse to grow Radiance sweet potatoes, a 110-day variety being grown in other parts of Canada.

"It was a way to increase our value without growing our land base," Lessner says. With Canadians consuming more sweet potatoes (66,000 tons imported from the U.S. annually) and a processing plant for regular potatoes a couple of hours away, sweet potatoes seemed like a natural choice.

Lessner took a course on greenhouse agriculture and the family erected a greenhouse in February. It's heated by a natural gas well that was drilled on the farm many years ago and grandfathered in for personal use. It's used as the energy source on the farm for irrigation and heating buildings.

Sweet potatoes are planted in the greenhouse in February and slips are cut three times from the green vines that grow. They are planted in 6-in. raised beds after the last frost, between May 15 and June 15.

They sold some and saved the rest for planting in February to grow slips. The potatoes are stored in a temperature-controlled trailer. Initially the heat and humidity were increased to cure the potatoes. Then both were lowered with the temperature no colder than 13C (55F) for winter storage to prevent sprouting or freezing.

Lessner notes that there's much to learn about greenhouse growing and sweet potatoes.

The biggest challenge is weed control



Alberta Sweet Potatoes cut over 26,000 slips in 2021, of which they sold half and planted the rest.

in the field because Western Alberta doesn't have a registered herbicide for sweet potatoes. Other provinces do, and so Lessner says they are working to change that. The family planted the slips in landscape cloth to cut down on weeds and used drip irrigation. Being able to use an herbicide and the farm's pivot irrigation would make it easier to grow bigger plots.

In 2021, they cut about 26,000 slips and sold half and planted the rest. With only social media for marketing, there have been many inquiries and some farmers plan to increase their orders in 2022.

"Sweet potatoes have been promoted as a new superfood and that appeals to consumers, plus they are local," Lessner says. There is also great potential in supplying locally grown slips that are hardy for Canadian growers.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Alberta Sweet Potatoes, Stephanie Lessner, Box 48, Jenner, Alberta, Canada T0J 1W0 (albertasweetpotatoes@gmail.com; www.albertasweetpotatoes.com).

Caboose Turned Into Guest Cabin

If you're going to Colorado Springs, Colo., anytime soon, you could stay in one of the most unusual guest cabins you've ever seen. Bridger Kucinski rebuilt a wood-sided caboose into a unique accommodation for Airbnb renters. It's a 1923 Baltimore and Ohio caboose that now overlooks the Red Rock Canyon area of Colorado Springs.

"I searched the internet for one and finally found it in New York," says Kucinski. "A

family had one for sale, so I flew out to see it. It had been in the family for 40 years. Shipping it to Colorado cost almost as much as the caboose."

The caboose is complete with the original wood trim on the inside. Kucinski, a house builder, is excited to add it to the multiple Airbnb units he has on his three acres.

"We started with a small apartment over our garage, and it was really popular," said



Kucinski's caboose sits on a 4 by 12-in steel beam structure overlooking a canyon.

Affordable MillRight CNC Machines

In his quest to find an affordable CNC router to work on a new invention, Derek Roberts stumbled on an even better idea - to make an affordable CNC router.

"I surveyed the market, and they were all high-priced, so I built my own machine and did woodworking with it. After I refined the model, I decided to put it out there and see if there was interest. I was hoping to sell 10 to 15 units; the market gobbled them up very quickly," Roberts explains.

Roberts now has four different models that are built in a 15,000-sq. ft. shop, as well as at a shop in a nearby town. The U.S.-made machines are sold on six continents to customers who use them for wood, metal, plastic, brass and aluminum projects for hobbies such as making flags to sell at craft shows or full-time businesses making everything from cabinets to aircraft panels.

Besides being affordable (starting at \$1,000 for a machine with an 8-in. by 9-in. work area to \$4,500 for heavy-duty, semi-industrial models), the equipment cuts faster and is built tougher compared to other units on the market.

"We are manufacturing so much of it in-house that we can be competitive," Roberts says. That includes making steel gear racks for the drive mechanisms, which cuts hardwoods faster than CNC equipment that uses rubber belts. MillRight also has large aluminum beams extruded for them that create a rigid bearing system. The aluminum rails are a sturdy 1/2-in. thick.

By making so many of their parts locally, Roberts says his company has fewer logistics issues than some businesses who can't get materials from overseas.

He continues to be amazed at the range of his customers, from crafters to labs and schools and even a couple of nuclear collider facilities. Farmers purchase CNC equipment



MillRight CNC machines come in different sizes and work well for both hobby or small business.

to make equipment parts for the farm or to use for a hobby in retirement.

There are free programs customers can use with the CNC machines, and Roberts is a dealer for Vectric software, starting at \$149 (no monthly subscription). He also has an expansion kit for the Mega V model to increase the cutting area from 19 in. by 19 in. to 4 ft. by 4 ft.

With most marketing done through Facebook social groups and a forum, customers are attracted to MillRight's affordability and quality.

"I never went back to my invention," Roberts notes. "Once I got into the CNC, it was obvious this is a much larger business."

Expansion continues as he plans to introduce a model with a 4-ft. by 8-ft. workspace. Details about different models and parts can be found on the website.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, MillRight CNC, 169 Bill Whitaker Rd. Dawson, Ga. 39842 (ph 229-439-6569; sales@millrightcnc.com; www.millrightcnc.com).



The ornate caboose cabin is trimmed out beautifully with wood.

Kucinski. "We've added others since and have more in the planning."

The caboose will be unusual in several regards. It rests on a 4 by 12-in. steel beam superstructure built on and over a steel shipping container. The container once served as on-site office and storage space at Kucinski's construction sites.

The steel beams were needed to provide support for the railroad ties, track and the caboose that sits on them. It also provides a base for a cantilevered deck in front of the caboose. Kucinski bought the steel grating he used from Repurposed Materials (www.repurposedmaterialsinc.com; ph 877-282-8733). A steel stairway will lead from the ground level to the deck with No. 8 rebar for the handrails.

"I wanted an overall industrial theme to the unit," says Kucinski. "I am planning to dress up the container, perhaps with corrugated metal siding. I'll let the steel superstructure

develop its own patina over time."

"The deck provides a great view of the 1,800-acre Red Rock Canyon spread out below and the wildlife that travels through it," says Kucinski. "We have deer, coyote, bear and even an occasional mountain lion."

When completed and available for rental, the caboose will feature a fold-out bed, kitchenette, and bath with shower. "Guests will be able to climb up and look out of the cupola on top," says Kucinski. "I expect a lot of people who see it on the Airbnb site will add it to their bucket list. The rate will likely be around \$200 during the high season when even a conventional motor rents for \$140 a night."

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Bridger Gene Kucinski, K2 Homes, 802 S. Nevada Ave., Colorado Springs, Colo. 80903 (ph 720-227-7944; k2Homes@msn.com).