

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](mailto:editor@farmshow.com).

Grain can be processed on-farm with this 8 by 20-ft. trailer that has a stone mill, blower, sifter and packaging system.



## Mobile Mill To Process & Package Grain

ReGen Mills will soon be processing corn, wheat and other grains on-farm. The mobile mill is the brainchild of a group of farmers dedicated to regenerative agriculture, where soil health is the priority.

"A core group of about 10 farmers came up with the concept and the brand name," says Russell Hedrick. "They include regenerative farmers from Texas to N. Dak. and Okla. to Ind."

Hedrick raises heritage grains in N. C. (Vol. 43, No. 4), mills them on his farm and markets corn meal, grits and flour under his own brand. These will be the three main products of the mobile mill as well.

Hedrick, Sarah Varble and Liz Haney, all associated with environmental and ag service consulting firm Soil Regen, are heading up the effort.

"The three of us are passionate about bringing profitability to farmers," says Varble. "We realize that a lot of farmers want to diversify their crops and raise heritage grains, but they don't have the know-how or finances to set up their own mill. We decided to take the mill to their farms."

The mobile mill will come to the farm, process the grain and package it. ReGen Mills will charge a small fee for milling and bagging, etc. An 8 by 20-ft. enclosed trailer is currently being outfitted with a stone mill, blower, sifter and packaging system all on 120V power. Everything will be automated from the time the grain comes in until packages are being filled.

"We will pull into the yard and a farmer can pull up with a gravity box and auger and we will start milling," says Hedrick. "All the farmer will need to buy is a freezer to store the product."

Packaging will have a consistent message about how the grain is grown regeneratively

(with no-till, cover crops and reduced outside inputs). "The back of the bag will have a profile of the farmer who produced the grain and a code that will link to a video on our website."

The overriding goal is to fill a niche between on-farm efforts like Hedrick's and regional grain processors. "We've seen larger companies try to scale up marketing of products from regenerative farms," says Haney. "However, we know the supply isn't there right now. By the time grain is trucked to a central location, costs are too high. Instead, we will come to the farm."

Hedrick points out that a 150-bushel corn crop will net about \$250 per acre as a commodity. However, products made with that corn will retail for about \$35,000.

"The farmers we have spoken with are excited about taking out the middleman," he says.

Haney adds that the goal is not to sell through a big box store, but to sell direct, farm-to-market. "Consumers will get these products straight from the farm," says Haney. "At the same time, they will learn about the farm and the practices the farmer is implementing to improve soil health and on-farm resilience."

Quality control is key in any brand. "We will have a system in place to verify the quality of the grain and the practices behind it," says Hedrick.

"Everyone we deal with will be part of the ReGen soil health family," adds Varble.

If the mobile mill is as successful as Varble, Haney and Hedrick hope, more mobile mills will follow.

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## Family Bakery Brings In Big Bucks

By Lydia Noyes

When Martha and Moses Troyer moved their family from Wisconsin to Colorado in 2011, they needed to find ways to support themselves. Starting a bakery was a natural choice. Martha's mother had run a successful Amish bakery for decades prior, selling pies, rolls, noodles, and lots of candy to local gift shops.

She decided to follow her mom's winning recipes, making a few modifications to make them unique. At the time, she had three small children, with one on the way.

Her Amish baked goods took off quickly at the local farmer's market.

After two years of managing the market primarily by herself, Martha realized her girls could be an asset. "They wanted a playhouse," she explained, "so I told them to start earning money to buy one." Martha was running out of time to bake her popular molasses cookies, so she put her daughters in charge of them. The girls boosted their marketing by setting out samples at their stand to entice customers and the cookies



Spearmint is a perennial that looks like alfalfa. It's used in various food products, candy, toothpaste and mouthwash.

## Spearmint Farmer Says Crop Is Complicated

The Dale Thacker Specialty Crops farm located near Bow Island, Alberta, is home to many unique crops including dill, hemp, peas and hybrid seed canola, but also features approximately 1000 acres of spearmint.

"We need to have significant acres to justify the cost of equipment and the entire process," says Thacker. "It's a unique industry. We've had stable acreage for many years."

Spearmint is a perennial plant that looks much like alfalfa in the field. It's added to many products including food, candy, mouthwash and toothpaste.

Thacker and his brothers began growing the crop around 1988 while trying to get out from under the Canadian Wheat Board's control. Mint grows well in their specific region of Western Canada due to high heat and cool evenings.

"It likes water, heat and lots of fertilizer," Thacker says. "It's a very robust growing plant so we use higher rates of fertilizer than in any of our other crops. Weed control is also a problem so we must select our cleanest fields."

Thacker explains mint is a sterile triploid meaning it doesn't produce seed. To establish the crop, plants begin in a laboratory, then are grown out in a greenhouse from where they're sold for about \$1 a plant. The 10,000 plants per acre are hand planted.

"We let them grow for a year, then use a digger to spread the root material using a homemade sprigging planter that will expand it 15 or 20 to 1 on a good year," Thacker says. "We let that grow for another year and then spread it out into meaningful acres. It's very risky and expensive and takes two or three years to establish a substantial acreage base."

Not like an annual where you just throw seed in the ground."

He says harvesting is a whole different process requiring specialized equipment including a distillation system. Mint is cut with a normal swather, and once dry, a forage harvester is used to chop and then load it into cooking vessels. These vessels are trucked to a still where steam is introduced, causing the spearmint oil to vaporize and exit the cooking vessel. The vapors are condensed back to liquid form and separated from the water.

"It's a long process that requires significant investment. You have to boil your entire field."

Thacker says the mint industry prices are subdued due to contracts being fully subscribed and overproduced.

"Once you're in it, you're somewhat committed. You've got a lot invested and you've got to recover costs. We use a 5-year rotation to control weeds, pests and disease."

The oil is sold in drums or totes through a brokerage system. Dealers take the oil and further rectify, purify and blend it, depending on the final destination.

"For all the risk and for what we get paid, it's not great, but it's something we're good at, our region likes it, plus we've done a lot of work to improve the distillation and planting process, so it works for us."

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The Troyer family made their Amish baked goods a family business selling a variety of goods at a local farmer's market.

soon became a bestseller.

It didn't take long to raise the money for their playhouse, and the girls have also purchased ponies, a saddle, and more. "Just this past week, the girls bought a registered German shepherd," says Martha. "Now we'll be able to make money off the puppies, too." The family is also saving their tip money, with plans to take a trip together to Maine or Alaska.

The family bakes all day Wednesday and Thursday morning for the Thursday market. Everyone works together to make over 300 fry pies, 30 pies, 50 to 60 loaves of bread, and over 200 rolls and donuts.

Martha says donuts and fry pies are the

most profitable. "Making 200 donuts costs just \$25 in supplies. I sell them for \$3 each, so that's almost \$600."

There's a 2 a.m. wake-up call for the Saturday market to finish the last of the cookies, and then everything gets sold within a matter of hours in a rush of market activity.

While the Troyer family has managed to make their Amish bakery a success, they want others to know just how much work is involved. "We make money on this, yes, but we make money while people are sleeping. It takes a lot of hard work to be a success, but financial freedom is worth it."

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