

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.



Converting sugar cane juice into syrup is a family tradition for Gene McNabb and his family in Louisiana.

Family Continues Tradition Of Making Sugar Cane Syrup

Gene McNabb of Pine Grove, La., gets his family involved every year in a family tradition of making sugar cane syrup. The 87-year-old remembers when he was a boy and his family extracted about 500 gallons of syrup from an acre, and it sold for 50 cents a gallon. He still has the horse-powered sugar cane grinder that was used to crush the juice out of the cane, although these days his family uses an antique mill converted to run off a tractor's pto.

Gene's son, John McNabb, has Haflinger ponies that he hopes to use on the old grinder in the future. It will add to the family gathering that includes his dad, himself, his brothers, a sister and their children.

"We've been making syrup as a hobby for a long time," he says, explaining that the event takes place after a hard freezing frost that drives higher sugar content into the stalk. In Louisiana that's anywhere between the first week of November into December.

Using a square-ended sugar cane machete, leaves are stripped off the cane before the cane stalks are cut and loaded on a trailer. They are run through a cane grinder and the juice is strained before going into a 300-gal. stainless steel pan on top of a firebox with

a hot wood fire. As the dregs rise to the top, they are skimmed off.

"Once the water evaporates out, you have a thick solution boiling in the pan. It will fuff up and you really have to be careful or it can boil over the side of the pan," McNabb says.

As soon as it hits 228° F, they put out the fire with a garden hose, and the syrup is emptied from a spout at the bottom of the pan into a stainless steel pot to cool slightly before filling bottles with the golden syrup. Depending on the weather, the process can take anywhere from 8 to 16 hrs.

"It takes 7 to 9 gal. of juice to make 1 gal. of syrup," McNabb says, noting that the syrup has a brown sugar flavor.

The cane stubble grows back the following spring and with proper care the cane produces syrup for 4 or 5 years.

During the syrup-making gatherings, the McNabb family enjoys some of the syrup on biscuits made by McNabb's daughter, along with meals of gumbo and other Louisiana cuisine. The family splits up the rest of the syrup for personal use and to give as gifts.

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"Drop Box" Parts Delivery

Apple Farm Service customers don't have to drive to one of their 4 stores to get parts. They can stop by a local drop box and pick up needed parts. That's important when the equipment company's stores are as much as 100 miles apart. They stock 80,000 parts from more than 120 different manufacturers.

"We have 11 drop boxes spread out around our territory at cooperating businesses and hope to add a few more," says Kent Holmes, Apple Farm Service, Covington, Ohio. "Our customers really appreciate not having to make longer drives."

The drop boxes save time and mileage for customers. To use them, a customer has to have an account with the company or provide a credit card number when ordering parts. Parts are delivered to the closest drop box to the customer, often as an employee heads home for the day.



Parts are delivered to the closest drop box to the customer.

"We haven't had any problem with theft," says Holmes. "If we did, we could install locks, but you can't find more honest customers than farmers."

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Apple Farm Service, 10120 W. Versailles Rd., Covington, Ohio 45318 (ph 937 526-4851; www.applefarmservice.com).

"CSA Card" Boosts On-Farm Sales

Dee Elliot doesn't have to worry about her CSA customers liking what they get in their deliveries each week. They pick out what they want themselves, and Elliot doesn't have to box, bag or deliver.

"Before starting our CSA in 2014, we researched other CSA's from the customer point of view," says Elliot, who manages Elliot Farm with her brother Ken and her husband Jim Lough. "There were pros and cons. The cons included getting vegetables they didn't like or getting too much of a particular item."

They decided to go with a free choice CSA. They already had regular customers coming to their on-farm market. It's open 7 days a week, giving members lots of pick-up options versus having a delivery at a set time each week.

"Our customers buy a half or full share membership in early spring, just like with other CSA's," explains Elliot.

Initially, each member was listed on a spread sheet. As the CSA membership grew from 17 in 2014 to 200 in 2020, the cashier had to search through as many as 13 pages to mark off the weekly allowance. It was time consuming and a hassle for everyone. Like most other CSA's, if the customer went on vacation, they lost the value of that week's allowance. It wasn't rolled forward. All that has changed.

"We switched over to a Harvest Card," says Elliot. "It has a preloaded amount like a gift card. As an incentive, we add 10 percent to the amount. If they buy a full share at \$450, they have \$495 to spend whenever they want on whatever they want."

As Elliot explains, "They are helping us with our pre-season costs, and we can count on them to patronize our farm stand. On their end, they get extra value."

Customers are now getting even more for their CSA share. In addition to what



Free choice CSA allows customers to pick out what they want themselves and pay for it with a pre-loaded Harvest Card.

they raise, the Elliots carry locally made artisanal bread and cheese, as well as meat, eggs, honey and berries from local vendors. They partner with other local farms and visit Boston's Farmers Market for items not available locally.

The Harvest Card gave CSA members even more choice. They are free to use the card as they please.

"Our members can use the harvest card on whatever they want and as much as they want," says Elliot. "If it's barbecue season and they want to spend \$100 on sweet corn, they can."

If a CSA member uses up their Harvest Card amount, they can ask the cashier to add \$50 or \$100 to the card from their credit card. They also have the option of doing so from the Elliot Farm website. Once again, the Elliots add value to the transaction.

"For every \$100 they add, we give them another \$10 in store credit," says Elliot.

Having the Harvest Card system in place gives the Elliots another option. Customers can buy gift cards for friends and relatives in \$50, \$75, \$100 or larger amounts.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Elliot Farm, 202 Main St., Lakeville, Mass. 02347 (ElliotFarmCSA@gmail.com; www.elliottfarm.org).

Homestead Operates Vintage Gristmill

For the past 20 years, a water-powered gristmill built in New Jersey back in 1760 has been grinding grains near Waco, Texas. The Homestead Gristmill is a featured part of the Homestead Heritage farm, a Christian community located in Texas.

The gristmill was originally used until 1918 and then sat unused until 2000. At that point, the hand-hewn, timber frame mill was disassembled and rebuilt at its new home. Completely restored, the millstones are still powered by a water wheel.

Mill products are used by the members of the community on their small homesteads that are part of Homestead Heritage's 550-acre farm. The various non-GMO, chemical free or organic wheats and yellow and white corn ground in the mill are grown on the farm or elsewhere in Texas. Blue corn is sourced from a farm in New Mexico.

The farm's craft village is set up to accommodate tourists and groups with working craft shops, classes and hands-on exhibits. In a typical (non Covid-19) year, it hosts 40,000 visitors plus another 20,000 during the Homestead Fair at Thanksgiving. In addition, 5,000 to 6,000 students tour the farm and village each year.

Visitors can watch the milling process and buy milled grain flours and mixes or eat foods using the mill's products in the village restaurant. Products are also available from the Homestead Gristmill's online store. A 10-lb. package of stone-ground, certified organic, whole white wheat flour is priced at



Originally built in 1760, restored vintage gristmill uses millstones that are still powered by a water wheel.

\$17.75. Most mixes and specialty products like grits are available as well.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Homestead Gristmill, 800 Dry Creek Rd., Waco, Texas 76705 (ph 254 829-2135; info@homesteadgristmill.com; www.homesteadgristmill.com).