Innovation Drives Daleville Entrepreneur

Jeff Ginn pursues niche market business in aquaponics

Tucked into the countryside on the outskirts of Daleville, Indiana, is an innovative greenhouse with an innovative proprietor.

About a year ago, Jeff Ginn opened his aquaponics business at this locale to grow fresh produce and raise fish in a symbiotic system. The fruits and vegetables are grown without soil in water-filled tanks, and the water recirculates through the fish tank. The fish waste fertilizes the plants, and the plants clean the water for the fish. Jeff is also hoping to add Australian crayfish to the bottom of the produce tanks, as they can live by eating the plants’ dead roots. Sounds about as efficient as a system can get.

A former tool and die maker, Jeff was injured in a motorcycle crash in 2004 and uses a wheelchair for mobility. Indiana AgrAbility is working with Indiana Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) to acquire technologies and modifications for improving his employment outcomes. Recommendations include: a tracked, stand-up wheelchair to improve his outdoor mobility and allow him to easily reach higher equipment; additional mats on the gravel floor of the greenhouse for easier wheelchair navigation; and a modified entrance to his greenhouse for improved safety and ease of access.

Thus far, Jeff has sold most of his produce to a local restaurant, but he is now leaning toward a community supported agriculture (CSA) business model. Customers would “subscribe” to the CSA and receive, at regular intervals, an allotment of produce and/or fish.

With his innovative spirit and help from groups like AgrAbility and VR, Jeff and his business have strong growth potential.

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VETERANS OUTREACH CONTINUES TO EXPAND

AgrAbility has made more inroads in serving our nation’s veterans in cooperation with groups like Purdue’s Beginning Farmer/Rancher Development Program (BFRDP) and the Farmer Veteran Coalition. As part of the BFRDP grant, AgrAbility recently sponsored a veterans’ workshop covering topics like permaculture and rotational grazing, followed by a tour of veteran Zach Morris’s Freebird Farm and Homestead in Walton, Indiana. Indiana farmers who are military veterans or on active duty can now market their products using the Indiana Grown and Homegrown by Heroes initiative. The Indiana State Department of Agriculture, the Farmer Veteran Coalition, and Indiana AgrAbility partnered to make these marketing labels available. The program was launched February 29 with Governor Pence and Indiana farmer veterans participating. The AgrAbility National Training Workshop featured a variety of veteran-focused activities, including a presentation by Lanon Bacaam, USDA’s liaison to farmer veterans. Mr. Bacaam later invited Cindy Chastain to testify about AgrAbility before the House Committee on Agriculture during a hearing on the role of veterans in national food security on May 18. View it at www.tinyurl.com/agrabilityvets.

A veterans’ training workshop is scheduled for July 30 at Purdue, and a tour of another veteran-owned operation, Ponderosa Aqua Farm in Spencer, IN, is set for October 15. For more information on these and other veteran-related events, email Cindy Chastain chastai1@purdue.edu.

TOOLBOX Spotlight

The folding, portable Deckmate Trailer-Access Ladder is designed to provide safe entry onto and exit from flatbed and van trailers. It’s 18 inches wide, 53 inches long (30 inches when folded), less than 20 pounds, and has a 400-pound weight capacity.

The Deckmate hooks on the rubrail of flatbeds or has a bolt-on bracket for vans; thus it should not slide, tip, or blow over in the wind. Features include storage pocket, removable support bar, anti-skid steps, reflective markers, and a hinge design to prevent pinching of fingers or clothes from getting caught when folding/unfolding.

For more information on this and other helpful technologies, visit THE TOOLBOX Assistive Technology Database at www.agrability.org/toolbox.
Gardening is one of America’s most popular hobbies, and arthritis is America’s leading cause of disability. However, don’t assume that one must give up gardening, including small-scale agricultural production enterprises, when arthritis pain strikes.

The National AgrAbility Project and the Arthritis Foundation recently published a new resource: Arthritis and Gardening: A Guide for Home Gardeners and Small-Scale Producers. This 20-page booklet covers such topics as pre-planning your garden to accommodate arthritis, helpful tools and accessories, preparing your body for gardening activities, and minimizing arthritis pain while gardening.

Email agrability@agrability.org for a complimentary copy or download it at www.agrability.org/resources/arthritis/.

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