

Property Management

Farm income can flourish from fresh ideas



COMMON GROUND

By KIM ROBERTS

WHEN you hear the phrase “alternative lifestyle,” the image of the family farmer might not be the first that comes to your mind. But why not? Why don’t more farmers add a little spice to their economic pie? It may

be obvious to some, but the challenges of farming don’t always pay the bills. So what can you do? Well, the alternative lifestyles that follow might give you some ideas.

My favorite examples of alternative income comes from a little quilt store outside Reardan, Wash., in the middle of wheat country. The Buggy Barn was founded by sisters Pam Soliday and Janet Nesbitt in 1996. With their passion for quilting, talent for design and astute business model, their shop’s

been named one of the top stores in the United States. There’s no doubt as you motor over two miles of wash-boarded road that this is — in its own way — an agri-business run by a farm family. However, just like in the movie, they built it and people came. The sisters have subsequently become nationally sought-after quilting authors and instructors.

A different type of success story comes from Three Forks, Mont., perhaps better known as “Wheat Montana,”

where the Folkvord family has taken “low rainfall, high elevation and cool nights” (from www.wheatmontana.com) along with a ton of ingenuity to create a facility that “includes grain cleaning, processing, flour milling and a full-scale bakery that services a five-state area.” Even the Burger Kings in Montana feature Wheat Montana sandwich buns.

Out west in Trout Lake, Wash., Dan and Rosie Hostetter converted their 1890s home on 6 acres into a business called, The Farm — A Bed and Breakfast. They cater to hikers, wind surfers, bird watchers and skiers. A specialty of their business is hosting weddings, using their gardens and barn as the perfect backdrop for romance. The Farm is now listed in the new “National Geographic Guide to America’s Hidden Corners.”

Find your passion

One of my favorite risk-taking farm families is from Huntley, Wyo., where the Zimmerers had farmed sugarbeets, alfalfa, corn, beans and cattle since 1926. In 2001, Patrick Zimmerer wrote his college thesis on establishing vineyards in Wyoming. What started as 300 vines in 2001 has today become Table Mountain Vineyards with nearly 10 acres committed to viticulture featuring 10,000 vines of varietals including Frontenac, Frontenac Gris, Valiant and Foch — not traditional Wyoming farm fare.

Another renowned farmer with a vision is Elwood Landt, who more than 10 years ago created the first sporting clays course in eastern Washington. Hunters flock to Landt Farms Sporting Clays not for its wild game but for its world-class course that hosts everything from national competitors to corporate retreats. After all, nothing says team building and bonding better than a shotgun. Perhaps even better is that in 2003 Elwood was able to turn the range’s operation over to his daughter, Sally, and her husband, George. This next generation is keeping the family farm on target.

So when you think of alternative farm lifestyles, consider your passion. Whether it’s as outlandish as wine in Wyoming or as clever as shooting sports with year-round availability, there’s truly “gold in them thar hills.” It’s just your job to find it.

Roberts writes from Hoquiam, Wash.

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For more information

- The Buggy Barn, 28848 Tramm Road N., Reardan, WA 99029; 509-796-2188; www.buggybarnquilts.com
- Wheat Montana Farms, 10778 Highway 287, Three Forks, MT 59752; 406-285-3614; www.wheatmontana.com
- The Farm — A Bed and Breakfast, 490 Sunnyside Road, Trout Lake, WA 98650; 509-395-2488; www.thefarmbnb.com
- Table Mountain Vineyards, 5933 Road 48, (Mailing address: P.O. Box 24), Huntley, WY 82218; 307-459-0233; www.tablemountainvineyards.com
- Landt Farms Sporting Clays, 11829 North Landt Farms Lane, Nine Mile Falls, WA 99026; 509-464-2070