

A 'GROWING' BUSINESS L

Some people can never just rest on their laurels, and that's exactly the type of folks Johnnye and Regina Mabery are. In their past work, they crisscrossed the country as part of a construction team that built hundreds of Walmarts and Hobby Lobby stores. In those extensive travels, they kept passing through East Texas and something about it just called to them. So when they decided it was

their horses. In tune with ramping up their efficiency, the Maberys wanted to also ensure that their end product retained the nutrients and protein, which in great part depends on how quickly the grass is harvested and moved from the field and put under cover.

To achieve this, the Maberys bought more property just outside of Mineola and named it the Beulahland Hay

Depot. As they expanded their business, their emphasis was on getting the hay up out of the meadows quickly and getting it stored under a roof to retain the highest quality. When all the field work is done, and as hay orders come in, the hay is unrolled and rebaled into square bales because, as Johnnye quips, "We feel like all of God's creatures deserve a square meal."

Johnnye says, "We've now gotten it down to a science. Cut it one day. Bale it the next. And within three days, the hay is in the barn." Never mind that the "barn" he is alluding to is over 50,000 square feet of under-roof storage. In theory, since the rebaling operation is done under cover, it can be done regardless of weather conditions or whether there's daylight. In the end, their round-to-square baling methodology started paying off.

But, not to be satisfied with the efficiency gained, it did not take long for Johnnye to make some of his own modifications to his operation, with the help of nephew and shop foreman Scott Maddox and assistant Rusty Love. Together, they came up with a

chain advancer, grabbers and an integrated accumulator that fairly spits out the square bales. For instance, the process used to require eight people, four tractors, two trucks and 10- to 12-hour days to put 1,800 square bales in the barn. Now, in that same amount of time, the business is able to produce approximately 6,000 square bales. And that's a good thing, since the haymakers are now leasing and caring for over 3,000 acres of hay meadows and producing a whopping 250,000 square bales annually.

Primarily, the hay sold at Beulahland is high-end hay, and Johnnye says, "Doing higher-quality hay, you have to put more into it. But, in the end, you get back what you put into it." For example, for all leased fields, they heavily manage the property by fertilizing and performing weed man-



Regina and Johnnye Mabery show off a small part of their newly refurbished pellet mill, which will make feed, pellet stove fuel, animal bedding and other materials. Plans are to have all systems up and running this month.

time to put down some roots, they took two months to investigate all of East Texas. And it was in the spring of 1998 that they found their ideal home in a 35-acre ranch called Beulahland near Lake Lydia.

Initially when they moved here, they started a modest hay operation on their land with one tractor and lots of muscle. Once that operation was under way, the Maberys decided to branch out to produce more hay, but they also wanted to streamline their newest venture by eliminating the inefficiencies that intrinsically happen when producing horse-quality, square-baled hay. In their research, they found it's much more efficient and economical to harvest large round bales of hay and then later rebale them into square bales, which are what most customers want to buy to feed

LEADS TO A SQUARE MEAL



agement to ensure consistent protein count in the hay. Hay that measures at least 15 percent protein goes into their No. 1 barn, and hay from 12 percent to 15 percent goes in the No. 2 barn and is priced accordingly. Regarding his business model, he says, “This country grows a lot of hay, and people have the conception that hay is a filler. We put out a better grade of hay, so less mineral supplements are needed for the animals.”

Regina says, “We cater to working horses, cutting horses, reiners and race horses. Their owners do not only want a higher-quality hay, they demand it.” As a testament to that quality, both the Grand Reserve NCHA horse and the 2009 Preakness winner both eat Beulahland Hay; it’s also on the approved list and gobbled up by horses at the race tracks in Louisiana. Johnnye also maintains jokingly, “We like to say our hay is so good it even makes humans want to add ranch dressing and pig out.”

As part of their hay business, the Maberys have also added some diversified aspects, such as trucking their own hay direct to customers, selling to hay brokers and offering value-added containerized hay. For the containerized hay, they always have an enclosed steel shipping container filled with first-grade hay that’s ready to go at a moment’s notice. When ordered, a container goes to a site and acts as a storage facility, keeping the hay secure and fresh until it’s all used. When empty, Beulahland picks up the container. The containerized hay also has another side benefit, as it allows the customers the ability to insure their stables and out-

buildings because no hay is stored there; many insurance companies will not issue a policy on buildings that store hay because of fire hazard.

Even with the diversification of their hay business, one thing that grated on Regina and Johnnye was what they call “waste factor,” or “shorts.” In moving the hay on conveyances to unroll the large bales, small lengths of hay break off, resulting in an accumulated waste of their high-quality hay. This hay is still full of the protein and nutrients animals need, but it can’t be rebaled and nobody wants loose sacks filled with hay bits. But, Johnnye says he did not have the heart to discard it, so the shorts began to stockpile. Then the Maberys started looking for ways to turn that first-quality fodder into a commodity. And that has led to their latest venture.

Basically, what they plan to do is turn their own “trash,” and eventually other people’s “trash,” into treasure. Johnnye said, “If you are going into business that is customer-oriented in this downsized economy, you have to offer a service or product that is close to or better than the same quality, but cheaper and saves people money.” His thought process is that just about anything can be made into a pellet, and they wanted to see their high-grade hay shorts used as food. So, they began investigating pellet manufacturing operations.

After travels to Michigan to an operating feed mill, Johnnye discovered a mill here in Texas, in Stephenville, that was for sale. After inspecting it, he took a chance and bought all of the feed mill equipment, then started the labor-intensive process of dismantling it piece by piece and trucking it to Beulahland. He and Scott and other employees painstakingly broke every machine down and sanded, greased, painted and refurbished all of the parts. Then they took those tons of jumbled steel and slowly began to build a feed mill customized for Beulahland.

As the mill is being put together and a system of conveyances for the production line is being developed, Johnnye has been heavily experimenting with recipes for different types of high-quality but affordable feed made from Coastal hay and with mixtures of alfalfa, corn, molasses, wheat bran and other ingredients to make cattle feed and deer range pellets. Using their

The Maberys are extremely active in the agricultural community and host various groups, like these visitors with the Wood County Agricultural Tour, who look on as Johnnye turns a round bale of hay into a ‘square meal.’



continued on page 24

GROWING BUSINESS

continued from page 23

own hay production waste to make a commodity is pretty smart, but the Maberys weren't satisfied to just turn their own trash into treasure. Now they've set their sights on other people's waste byproducts and are keen to turn those into a variety of products, too, using a separate section of their production line.

Additional products they plan to offer locally include hardwood pellets for pellet stoves, as well as softwood pellets for animal bedding. They hope to get some of the raw materials from logging leavings, cabinetmakers, pecan growers and other operations. Another end product they are experimenting with uses drywall coupled with wood shavings to make chicken house bedding. Much new drywall, about 17 percent, is wasted in construction, while remodeling jobs also create huge amounts with disposal becoming a problem in landfills. Johnnye says, "We want to take that refuse and make it a commodity."

In talking with Johnnye and Regina, it is clear they are extremely enthusiastic about what they are doing. They believe the possibilities are almost endless in what types of refuse they can keep from a landfill. For example, they reference a high-end coffee shop that recycles its grounds into fertilizer pellets and another operation that uses avocado seeds to make cattle feed. The only core criterion is that it makes good business sense for them, and they insist that whatever product they fabricate is also of good value and quality for their customers.

To sum up their plans, Johnnye says, "I think we can make an impact on Wood County." Well, Johnnye and Regina, we think you can, too.

Beulahland Hay Depot is served by Wood County Electric Cooperative and is at 1580 CR 3230; the phone number is (903) 967-7468. To learn more, visit beulahlandhaydepot.com.

Texas Co-op Power

A Benefit of Co-op Membership

Have you ever opened your mailbox and wondered, "Why am I getting this magazine?"

The answer is, because you are a member of Wood County Electric Cooperative (WCEC). Texas Co-op Power is provided as a benefit of membership to those 1.2 million households and businesses that get electricity from one of the 60 sub-



scribing co-ops. WCEC and other Texas electric co-ops use these pages in the center of the magazine to communicate news of particular interest to our members, including legally required postings of co-op business, such as annual meeting notices or rate change proposals.

These pages, which are unique to the edition published for WCEC, also give us an opportunity to share information on electrical safety, energy efficiency and write feature articles of interest to our members. This fits with two of the principles this cooperative was founded on: Concern for Community; and Education, Training and Information.

Texas Co-op Power is produced by Texas Electric Cooperatives, the organization that represents electric co-ops across the state. The award-winning publication recently has tackled such issues as discussing the future of electricity, explaining the electric grid and examining large-scale wind and solar power systems.

The total cost for your copy of the magazine is 32 cents, well less than the cost of a first-class stamp.

The power of aggregation, where many co-ops come together to share the expenses of printing and mailing, makes the magazine a cost-efficient form of communication. Much of the expense of publishing Texas Co-op Power is covered by revenue from the magazine's advertisers.

The magazine is able to keep its costs low by managing print, paper and postage expenses.

"At Texas Co-op Power, we try to make every issue a healthy balance between stories that are just plain fun to read and those that take a little more thought," said Carol Moczygemba, executive editor. "We know subjects like transmission lines and power plants can be challenging, but we believe our readers want to stay informed about important issues that affect their co-ops and their pocketbooks."

With every issue, the staff at Texas Co-op Power strives to live up to its mission statement: "To enhance the quality of life of its member-customers in an educational and entertaining format."

Wise Investments in Energy Efficiency

The economic uncertainty we're facing these days has many of us putting money into something with which we feel comfortable: our homes. Making a few upgrades around the house generally pays big dividends. And when boosting energy efficiency is one of them, the decision becomes a no-brainer.



© CHRISTINA RICHARDS | DREAMSTIME.COM

If you've added insulation to your home or made other energy-efficient improvements, you may be eligible for a tax credit.

For any energy-efficiency work done at your residence during the coming year, Uncle Sam will foot 30 percent of the bill. Not a bad deal! Through the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act—better known as the stimulus bill—the Internal Revenue Service offers a personal tax credit of up to \$1,500 for energy-efficiency improvements made to existing homes during 2009 and 2010.

The credit covers 30 percent of the cost of adding insulation materials and exterior doors, windows and roofs designed to help reduce a home's heat loss or gain. It also includes efficient central air conditioners, air-source heat pumps, hot water boilers and biomass stoves.

For weatherization-related work, the credit covers only the cost of materials. With heating, ventilation and air-conditioning systems, as well as biomass stoves, installation costs also count toward the credit.

So how does the math work out? Say you spend \$1,000 on new insulation. You would get, in the form of a tax credit, \$300 off your tax bill. If you spend \$3,000 to purchase a new HVAC system and have it installed, you'd have a \$900 tax credit to show for it.

To take advantage of the program, a home improvement must have taken place after February 17, 2009 (the day the stimulus bill was signed into law), and products must meet specific energy-efficiency criteria. A few rules of thumb will help you determine those criteria.

For exterior windows and skylights, rely on the Energy Star label. For other efficiency upgrades, request what's called a

“Manufacturer Certification Statement” that the product or component qualifies for the tax credit. Many manufacturers post these on their websites, but be sure to verify that the product does qualify before making a purchase. You can also visit www.irs.gov/recovery to review guidelines for eligible purchases.

Energy tax credits reduce taxes owed dollar for dollar and can be carried forward to following years. While they can help boost any refund you receive, you won't receive a check directly for the credit amount. You can file for energy tax credits using IRS Form 5695, with a total maximum value of \$1,500 for improvements made in 2009 and 2010.

Simple Steps for Winter Safety

SPACE HEATERS should be used sparingly and safely, always following the manufacturer's operating recommendations and keeping them several feet away from all objects. Heaters may require cleaning every so often. This can be done by first unplugging the heater and simply vacuuming to remove dust. Do not dismantle the heater for cleaning.

ELECTRIC BLANKETS should be checked for damage before they are used. Look for kinks, worn wires, scorch marks or breaks in the heating element. Remember, electric blankets have a limited life, and if there is any doubt about their safety, throw them out and replace them.

DON'T TANGLE WITH TINGLES— If you receive electric shocks or tingles from an appliance, turn it off, unplug it, do not use it, and discard it or get it checked out immediately.

SMOKE DETECTORS and carbon monoxide detectors should be tested to make sure they are working properly.

SURGE PROTECTORS should be used for all valuable electronics. And, if the holidays brought additional computers, TVs and other electrical devices into your home, be sure not to overload electrical circuits.