

# Growing Your Own Oatmeal



Russ Miller's restored Clipper seed cleaner which he uses to clean his hull-less oats.

One of the big farm stories of the year is happening at farmers' markets. More and more the consumer finds not just fruits and vegetables for sale, but just about anything that the fertile minds of imaginative farmers can think up.

Russ and Beth Miller are a good example. At their booth at the farmer's market in Bellefontaine, Ohio, they sell sausage from their own hogs plus their own eggs and homegrown grains—all produced organically. Their most intriguing product, at least to me, is hull-less oats. It looks more like wheat than oats, actually, without the tight hulls that wrap around the groats on ordinary oats. All the processing necessary to make your own extra nutritious breakfast is to run the oats through a flaker attachment like the one on Beth's Bosch Compact kitchen mixer. The grains come out rolled or flaked, ready for sale or to cook just as you would any oatmeal. Or you can bake the flakes, which is what Beth did for us when we were visiting. The rest of the delicious meal was Russ's cooking: fried blue corn mush from their own cornmeal, pancakes with a combination of their oats, blue corn and a white wheat they get from a friend, plus a special omelet from their own eggs with cheese and bell peppers in it, and their own sausage. Needless to say, all was very tasty.

I tried to raise hull-less oats many years ago some 50 miles north of the Millers with somewhat disastrous results. Birds, mainly red-winged blackbirds, swooped in and ate most of the acre I planted when the oat groats were in the milky stage. So my first question to Russ was about birds. He shrugged. He hasn't had any significant problem. Blackbird populations aren't high in his area, or, as I suspect, aren't as

—Gene Logsdon

high in Ohio anywhere as they were 30 years ago.

Russ grows his oats just like any other oats, in the age-old rotation with alfalfa and corn. The only thing different is his practice of storing the grain after harvest in an old "wagon drier," a rather strange piece of equipment that was popular for a brief time back in the late 1950s when farmers, switching from harvesting ear corn to shelled corn (I still think that was a big mistake) desperately needed a way to dry the grain down quickly at harvest time in wet years. The wagon drier looks sort of like a regular farm wagon, but has a screened floor. Originally it was equipped with a gas or oil heater in the front of the wagon and a fan run by the power take-off on the tractor to blow hot air through the false bottom of the wagon to dry the grain. The idea was to fill it with some 175 bushels of grain and dry it for several hours or overnight. That didn't work very well in practice and in any event was too slow and so wagon driers went the way of so much other outmoded equipment. Russ found one rusting away in a field and realized that while he didn't need hot air to dry his oats, the screen floor could provide extra insurance that the crop would stay dry and not mold because air could circulate naturally up through the wagon bed. The owner gave him the wagon.

There's no telling how much money Russ saves with his knowing eye for old, low-cost equipment that he can put to new uses. To clean his oats he refurbished one of those old wooden Clipper seed cleaners once common on all farms. He uses a 1959 Allis Chalmers 66 combine to harvest oats and a 1953 Oliver #5 ear corn picker to harvest his corn. He is the only farmer I have met in years who feeds ear corn directly to hogs like I always did, rather than grinding it. He feeds some of his oats to the hogs and throws in some late-cutting alfalfa hay daily too, other traditional practices. The combination of oats and corn is a better feed for hogs and usually costs less than feeding only corn. The alfalfa is a good source of protein and vitamins as well as roughage.

He also feeds his hogs whey which he hauls from Blue Jacket Dairy just across the road. The King family at Blue Jacket makes traditional artisan cheeses from their own milk and sells them at the farmers' market too—another amazing story I hope to write about soon.

The Millers farm about 22 acres organically, with a 16-acre field divided into four rotated fields of corn and oats and two of alfalfa in the traditional manner. A pasture on the other side of the farm is divided into rotated pastures for a small



Beth Miller running hull-less oats through a flaker attachment on her kitchen mixer.

brood cow herd. Russ took off four cuttings of hay this year, and in late October, when my wife and I were visiting, the stand was lush and tall enough to cut again. Although it was too late to make regular hay, he was thinking about taking a fifth cutting as balage, wrapping the wilted hay in plastic bags in the usual manner. I asked him if he worried about potash shortages in his alfalfa since he was taking off four, maybe five, cuttings a year and did not use chemical fertilizers.

"I apply about 8 to 10 tons of manure per acre every year," he replied. "I take soil samples regularly and so far no shortage of any nutrients has shown up."

His chickens, Golden Comets, get whole grain corn and oats too. "As far as I can tell, the hens lay just as well eating whole grains coarsely milled by an old CS Bell with some supplement mixed in rather than a traditional milled corn and full supplement ration," he says. He keeps them in a roomy pen on the lower floor of his big bank barn with a deep litter system that requires only periodic manure removal. His hogs are run on deep straw bedding that is allowed to build up. He cleans the pig pens about once a month with his old skid loader, stores the manure on a concrete pad outside the barn next to his four fields, and spreads it in late summer and fall as time permits.

In earlier years, Russ milked cows and farmed the conventional way. "I had visions of my own agricultural empire. Easy credit tempted me away from sound fiscal practices. I was forced out when interest rates went to 22% and my loan was called in. It was a dark time in many ways, but ultimately, one of the best things that could have happened to me and my family."

He became a high school math teacher. But a few years ago, at a church conference on sustainable agriculture, he and Beth became interested in sustainable farming methods and realized that this was a way to fulfill their love of farming. "What we do is hard work," he explains, "but there is a verse in Isaiah 55 that says, 'Why spend your money on that which is not bread and your labor on that which does not satisfy? By

growing good healthy food we are doing work that satisfies in many ways. Not the least of which is hearing about my young grandchildren making plans to take over the farming so Grandpa can spend more time helping Grandma Beth in the garden." 🐾

Beth Miller's recipe for baked oatmeal using the Millers' hull-less oats.

**Baked Oatmeal**

- ½ cup oil or applesauce
- ½ cup brown sugar
- 2 eggs
- 1 tsp. vanilla


**Mix Together**

**Then Add**

- 3 cups rolled oats
- 2 tsp. baking soda
- ½ tsp. salt
- 1 cup milk

Put in greased baking dish.  
Bake at 350 degrees for 30 minutes.

Gene and Carol Logsdon have a small-scale experimental farm in Wyandot County, Ohio. Gene is the author of numerous books and magazine articles on farm-related issues and is a regular contributor to Farming Magazine.



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