

Farm-Based Distilleries Catching On Fast

There are nearly 2,000 small distilleries around the country and hundreds of new ones are being launched every year, including two rural-based businesses that have found a way to work distilling into their operations.

But craft distilling is not for the faint of heart. It's an expensive, time-consuming business to start and it can take years before the first bottle is ever sold.

Stumpy's Spirits

Near Columbia, Ill., not far from St. Louis, Adam and Laura Stumpf operate Stumpy's Spirits on their 8th generation 4,000-acre family farm. Nearly 200 acres is dedicated to specialty grains for their whiskeys, bourbons and vodkas. Everything in their bottles, including the water, comes from their farm. Their whiskey reflects the soil, climate, specific grain varieties, minerals from their deep limestone aquifer, and a passion for perfection.

Adam grew up on the farm, became a mechanical engineer, and then worked 4 years at Anheuser-Busch where he learned the art and science of brewing. While working on a class assignment for his MBA he created a distillery business plan which became the foundation for Stumpy's Spirits.

"I was armed with farming and brewing knowledge, mechanical and business skills, but I quickly realized I needed tenacity, patience, and money," says Adam. He learned that a federal license takes months to earn and requires a mountain of paperwork.

With the federal permit in hand, state and county requirements had to be met. Some of the Stumpf's land had to be rezoned from farm to commercial. "During the start-up phase we worked hard to find the best traditional processes to produce what we wanted," Adam says. "This involved taste bud training, learning the best of American whiskey production, and sampling the nuanced differences in grain varieties including rye, barley, and white or red corn."

They changed equipment 4 times and



Adam and Laura Stumpf plant almost 200 acres of their farm to specialty grains for the whiskeys, bourbons and vodkas they produce.

experimented with pot stills and continuous column stills to see which one worked best for each type of spirit. Working long hours 7 days a week, they got the right recipes and sent samples for lab analysis so they knew exactly how to duplicate the unique tastes in each small batch.

Today the Stumpfs have production and sales help from 14 full and part-time employees. They do this all while raising a family and running their farm operation.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Stumpy's Spirits Distillery, 1727 Centerville Road, Columbia, Ill. 62263 (ph 618 281-7733; www.stumpyspirits.com).



Andy Craig, Jim Simpson and Larry Tammel operate a craft distillery near Harmony, Minn., selling their products in a uniquely-shaped bottle with an eye-catching label.

Harmony Spirits

In Minnesota, long-time friends Andy Craig, Jim Simpson and Larry Tammel are owners and operators of Harmony Spirits, a rural-based craft distillery. All three men grew up on farms and Craig still actively farms in the area. They also worked together in the ethanol industry.

"We've been home beer brewers for many years and enjoyed many 'field trips' to distilleries in our region. We started to think it would be nice if we could find a good distillery closer to home," Simpson says, and that led to the idea of starting their own operation.

While the idea was easy, putting it into practice was another story. Aside from farming, the 3 had little other business experience, and they didn't have the financial capital to start a business. What they did have was the "can do" attitude of people who know how to work. Bringing their idea to fruition took 6 long years of planning, permitting, building, and fundraising before the burners finally turned on under their stills.

Today Harmony Spirits makes whiskey, bourbon, and vodka. The products are made with their own farm-grown crops and use limestone aquifer water that has nearly the

same profile as the famous Kentucky water. Harmony Spirits uses only oat and corn grains, so their products are gluten free. They grind their own grain and even their white oak barrels are Minnesota made.

Whiskey and bourbon are pot-stilled in small batches and run through a milk filter before bottling so the spirits retain the local grain flavor. The vodka is triple-distilled in column stills and then filtered through charcoal to give it a smoothness that customers like.

"We plan to add rum to our product mix and that requires cane sugar, which doesn't grow in the north-country," notes Simpson. "We will, however, use local honey in the rum so at least we can claim it's mostly local."

Harmony Spirits uses a unique bottle shape and an eye-catching label to help stand out in the burgeoning craft distillery field.

The owners also host tastings where liquor is sold or consumed, telling their story and letting people sample.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Harmony Spirits, 40 1st Ave. NW, Harmony, Minn. 55939 (ph 507 886-7687; www.harmonyspirits.net).



BET Vodka is made from sugar beet sugar by Ben Brueshoff and Jerad Poling in Wisconsin.

Sugarbeet Vodka

Ben Brueshoff and Jerad Poling are the two young men behind BET Vodka (pronounced "beet") that's made from sugar beet sugar.

The distillery dissolves the granules in water and other nutrients, ferments the mixture up to two weeks, distills it three times, then passes it through active carbon to produce a premium product. The men say the product has a smooth taste with a hint of peppered spice and vanilla essence. Vodka aficionados say it's best enjoyed neat with a few drops of orange bitters and a glass garnished with lemon peel.

Brueshoff and Poling positioned their product with a unique name and packaging to gain awareness. They use a 1951 Dodge pickup to promote their product and brand at personal and business "pop up" events.

They've worked hard to get BET Vodka into local restaurants and bars, sharing their "locally made" story.

"The product is truly unique in the marketplace," Brueshoff says, "and we've gained nice acceptance by having 3 different tasting events where we connect directly with consumers." Their "Simplified" \$400 package provides the pickup for a cocktail party and a "Sincere" package at \$700 provides 3 hrs. of bar service for up to 50 people with one signature cocktail. The "Social" package for \$1,000 provides 3 hrs. of bar service for up to 100 people and two signature cocktails.

"Our brand is definitely different because we've perfected a number of recipes that complement the smooth, all-around flavor of our product for special beverages throughout the year," Brueshoff adds.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, 45th Parallel Distillery, 1570 Madison Ave., New Richmond, Wis. 54017 (ph 715 246-0565; www.betvodka.com).



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