



At the Income Opportunities Workshop held recently, a guest reviews herb information with Maureen Rogers, left.

Fresh And Dried Herbs For Profit

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EVERETT (Bedford Co.) — Sixteen separate rural income opportunities were discussed at a special seminar held at the Everett Area Junior-Senior High School recently.

Sponsored by the Penn State Cooperative Extension, the Maryland Cooperative Extension Service, Saint Francis College Small Business Development Center, the West Virginia University Cooperative Extension Service; and the Virginia Cooperative Extension Service, subjects ranged from farm vacations to domesticating wild animals.

Speaking on "Fresh and Dried Herbs for Profit," was Maureen Rogers, director of Herb Growing & Marketing Network in Silver Spring.

It was a well-attended session with interests varying from growing herbs for personal use to that of Ramona Jablonski of Baltimore, Maryland, who said, "We have property in Illinois. It's a working farm, but I don't know how long it can remain that way and I'm getting ideas for ways to put the land to use."

Another couple, Roe and Helen Herb (That's right, herbs at a herb workshop) of Butler, had similar ideas. "We've not had dairy cattle since the children left home," said Helen. "We do raise some beef cattle, but we are looking for other ways to increase our income."

"Herbs are an up and coming industry," said Ms. Rogers. "But, you have to market just as you do any other type of alternative farm income."

"The ornamental market is a dead-end one. Don't expect to raise dried flowers for much more than your own enjoyment."

"Like it or not," Martha Stewart calls many of the shots. "Whatever she says is what is going to be in demand."

"Today," Ms. Rogers continued, "Herbs are being grown for medicinal and culinary purposes. But, unless you live in an area where there are a lot of four or five star restaurants, forget selling directly. Chefs are not as intelligent as we think."

"The FDA monitors all herbs grown for medicinal purposes so this can also be difficult."

"Herb plants are the best way to make a profit," emphasized the speaker. "Everyone wants to grow herbs, but most people will kill them off or they freeze out over winter."

"Baby Boomers who are enthralled with 'staying alive,' have been a great herb market source."

Maureen noted that purple coneflower, which is a weed, is in great demand. "It could be grown almost anywhere," she said.

"Golden Seal which has a mystique about it, is in short supply. Last year the price went from \$36 for 1/4 pound to \$65 almost overnight because the supply dried up."

The demand for culinary herbs has grown along with a health-conscious populace. "They are cutting the fat out of diets and replacing them with the taste of herbs."

Ginkgo which grows on a tree, has been the success of one southern plantation. Ginkgo is in demand for Alzheimer research.

Cat's Claw is being used for all types of arthritis. "The beauty industry is buying herbs at a rapid rate and they have to come from somewhere. Mary Kay is adding

rosemary to some of its face creams. I could use 1,000 tons of rosemary a month and don't know where to get it."

As a herb broker, Maureen says buyers would prefer to buy within the United States but sometimes it is impossible.

"I had a call for 1,000 pounds of basil in February," she said. "Tell me, where do you get 1,000 pounds of any herb in that month!"

Ms. Rogers cautioned those interested in growing herbs to get all of the knowledge possible.

"Read books, attend seminars, or take a course," she advised. Perdue University offers an extensive course in growing and marketing herbs. Cost is in the \$1,400 to \$1,800 range plus room and board but, according to Rogers, is worth every penny.

"The sad thing is that 80 percent of those attending are from outside the country," the speaker noted.

When marketing herbs, check out the competition, join a trade association, and never limit yourself.

Slow Cookers

HONESDALE (Wayne Co.) — A slow cooker can provide hot, nourishing meals on cold winter days. Because heat is direct and is combined with steam within a tightly covered container, the slow cooker does a better job of killing disease-causing microbes than does long-time, low-temperature cooking in a conventional oven. Still, be sure everything is clean — the cooker, utensils, work area and your hands! Choose recipes with a high moisture content for preparation in the slow cooker.

These could include chili, soup, stew and spaghetti sauce. Cut food into chunks or small pieces to ensure thorough cooking. It's best not to use the slow cooker for larger pieces, such as roasts or whole chickens, because the food will cook so slowly that it could remain in the bacterial danger zone too long. Fill the slow cooker no more than two-thirds full. Heat may not adequately penetrate to all parts of the food if the container is too full.



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