

Fresh eggs become couple's calling

By Dan McGee, Northern Nevada Business Weekly

A dachshund got Paul and Joy Schouweiler of Hadji Paul's Chicken and Feed into the chicken business.

Paul Schouweiler's wife, Joy Schouweiler, who breeds dachshunds, planned to trade a puppy for chickens in late 2007. Thinking she would get 40 chickens in exchange for the puppy, she got 100.

"I thought, 'What am I going to do with all these eggs?' So I went and got certified to sell them to the Great Basin Community Food Co-Op."



Paul and Joy Schouweiler

Soon afterward, her husband headed to Iraq as a military contractor. Back on the small family farm in Palomino Valley north of Spanish Springs, Joy Schouweiler accumulated chickens.

Says Paul Schouweiler, "Over the next two years we got about 300 more chickens. When I came back in 2010 that's when we had 700 chickens, became an LLC and got a business license."

Choosing a name – odd as Hadji Paul's Chicken and Feed sounds

– was easy.

While he was in Iraq, Schouweiler was nicknamed “hadji,” an Arabic sign of respect for anyone older than 50. He kept the honorific when he came home.

As egg sales grew, businesses sought them out.

“Actually, Whole Foods came to us wanting to get more local people into their store,” Schouweiler says. “They came out to the farm, checked everything as they want to make sure you’re legitimate, how you’re treating your animals.”

Demand spurred by word-of-mouth kept growing as they participated in several farmer’s markets. They use their website, as well a Facebook presence, to keep consumers informed where they’ll be selling eggs.

They also have several commercial customers such as Campo, which orders 100 dozen eggs a week, and the 4th Street Bistro, which uses four dozen a week. The list also includes Homage Bakery, Buenos Grill and Pathways at UNR.

In the winter, when hens lay fewer eggs, the Schouweilers restrict orders for retail customers so they can fill their commercial orders.

A larger flock will compensate.

“We could sell three times as many,” Schouweiler says. “Right now we are trying to expand the business to bring our chickens to over 2,000 laying hens.”

All the hens, who have a prime egg-production span of two years, live in predator-proof coops – allowing them room to run – with a shelter that keeps them out of the elements.

“The biggest challenge is the cost of the feed. As everything goes up, you’re trying to keep your price at a competitive level and reasonable for our customers that have been with us

for years. That's kind of tough," Schouweiler says. "Since we started doing this the feed has gone up 100 percent in five years."

The rising demand for organic eggs, meanwhile, requires a special and costly feed.

Chickens eat about anything, and the Schouweilers have plans to build a greenhouse for vegetables to help feed the flock. Three restaurants in the area also have show interest in purchasing vegetables produced from the greenhouse.

The couple is working with the Nevada Small Business Development Center at UNR to develop plans for expansion – and plans to ensure the business survives after they retire.

"We're already hadjis," says Joy Schouweiler with a laugh.