

*Microbusiness*

***Independence***



**Invent** Your  
Way Out of the  
Rat Race!



**Anna Hess and Mark Hamilton**

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## Part 1: Imagine independence

*“We are what we repeatedly do.”*

*--- Aristotle*



## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **Homesteading dilemma**

“I’m just so tired,” I moaned for the thousandth time, laying my head down on the kitchen table. It was October 2008, and I was working 25 hours a week for a nonprofit organization to pay the bills on our 58 acre homestead. While 25 hours a week may not sound like much to folks well entrenched in the rat race, it left me precious little energy for necessary chores on the farm. My husband-to-be, Mark, did a lot of farm work, but it was only our second year in residence and we were still whacking back blackberry and honeysuckle thickets in an effort to reclaim a few acres to grow our own food. The honeysuckle was currently winning.

“I have to drive an hour to a meeting tomorrow,” I complained,

“and I know the meeting will take all day.” While we loved our secluded farm, it took us a 45 minute drive, minimum, to get anywhere. I telecommuted as much as I could, but there always ended up being mandatory meetings and draining phone calls. Who knew it would be such a pain in the butt to save the world?

“You should take a vacation,” Mark said, looking frantically around the kitchen for some chocolate to cheer me up. “Don’t you have a few days saved up that you can use?”

“I’ve got a *month* saved up. But I can’t take it now. There’s that meeting tomorrow, a grant proposal that has to go out Friday, an event to plan for next week....” My voice trailed off and I winced, contemplating the hundred item to-do list on my desk. “This isn’t what I thought it would be like to live on the land.”

My whining was embarrassing even myself. After all, who was I to complain? All around us, folks were losing their jobs as the economy tanked, and at least we could pay our bills. Barely.

Mark seemed shaken by my doom and gloom. He sat for a moment in silence, mustering his thoughts. Finally, he came to a conclusion. “So quit,” he said.

I looked at Mark like he was nuts. How did he think we would pay the bills without my paycheck?

I wasn't alone in this homesteading dilemma. So many of us dream of leaving our houses and apartments in the city to go back to the land. But there's a big catch --- farming won't pay the bills. Unless you're willing to sink 40 plus hours a week into large scale agriculture, you'd better plan to have a job off the farm.

But all of the good jobs are in the city. So you either take a low paying job and work extra hours, or you bite the bullet and commute an hour or more a day into the office. I get emails all the time from folks who are dying to homestead, but they can't quite make the leap from that monthly paycheck to the great unknown of country life.

In October 2008, I wasn't ready to make the leap either. But Mark was. "We'll be fine, honey. You see, I have this idea...."

### Mark's idea

Fast forward ahead ten months to August 2009. A visitor to our homestead would see carefully mowed pastures for our chickens to browse on, hundreds of relatively weed-free raised beds full of vegetables, a growing orchard, and two big berry patches. Since our microbusiness took off, we've spent less than two days per week on paid work between us, and our income just keeps growing. I smile a lot more too. How did we get here from there? One word - microbusiness.

A microbusiness is technically a business that has fewer than five employees (or ten, depending on who you talk to.) It's not

### Examples of income from traditional, supplemental farm-based businesses

Product	Hours per week	Profit per week	Hourly wage
Free range eggs sold to friends (20 layers)	7	\$10	\$1.43
Honey sold twice a year at farmer's market (4 hives)	2	\$7	\$3.50
CSA (community supported agriculture) with two customers	10	\$45 (about 20 weeks of the year)	\$4.50
Grapes sold twice a year at a farmer's market (50 established vines)	2	\$10	\$5.00
Our microbusiness	13	\$827	\$64.00

really a very accurate term for our business, but it's the best we could find. Our business is more of a micromicrobusiness. Or maybe a nanobusiness. Whatever you call it, the proof is in the pudding. With less than a thousand dollars in startup costs, we

built a small, home-based business which started paying all of our bills in just six months. I'm here to tell you that you can do it too, and in a way that fits a simple, homesteading lifestyle. In fact, using all of the tips in this book, I'll bet we could have reached our current microbusiness income level in half the time.

It's a beautiful dream, but I'd be remiss if I didn't end this chapter with a few words of wisdom. If you really like your boss and you're most comfortable *not* being in control of your destiny, then this book is not for you. To make a microbusiness work, you have to be hungry for independence. You have to be willing to throw your heart and soul into the endeavor. In short, you really have to *want* it.

On the other hand, you don't have to live on a homestead to make your dream a reality. Anyone with a few extra hours, a little imagination, and some basic tools can become independently wealthy. Now's the time to start dreaming about what your ideal lifestyle will look like next year when you've quit your job and stopped worrying about money.

This is not a get rich quick book. Instead, it's a path to creating a regular income so you can quit your job and spend your time doing what you really enjoy. If that's what you're looking for, then read on. Creating a microbusiness isn't as hard as you might think.

## **Chapter 2: Visions of success**

### **The nitty gritty**

If you're like me, you're probably interested in seeing some nitty gritty details right about now. You might be asking --- What is your microbusiness, anyway? How much profit can I expect? How long did it take to break even?

To answer the first question, Mark invented an automatic chicken waterer that brings the innovations of the pros to the backyard. Due to the cyclical nature of chicken-keeping, our profit varies a lot from month to month, but we've seen a skyrocketing increase from year to year once we implemented the strategies outlined in this ebook. During the first year, we were working the kinks out of our microbusiness, but still managed to bring in nearly \$14,000 profit. During our second

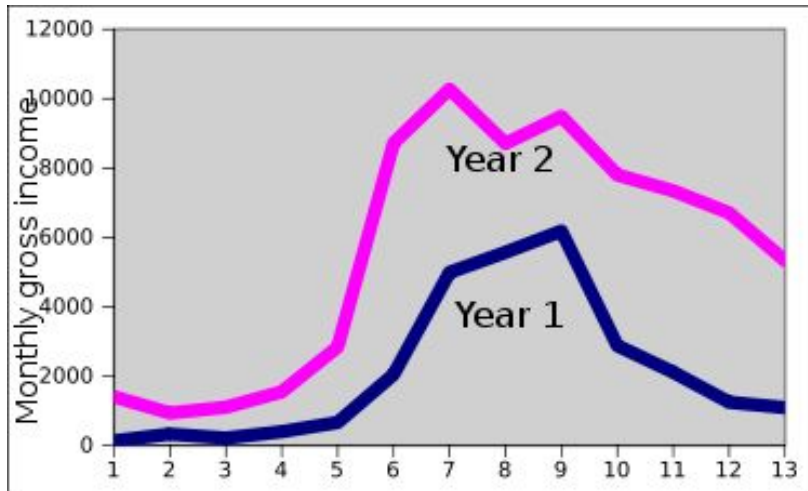
year, we saw a three-fold increase and our annual income jumped to \$41,000. As far as we can tell, the sky's the limit.

As for breaking even - we did that around month four. You should break even a good deal faster since we spent months one through three figuring out everything that we outline in the first few chapters of this book.

In fact, I wouldn't be surprised if you jumped straight to month six, the point at which I realized that Mark was right and we didn't need a salary to survive. Now, we spend our work days building waterers and driving them to the post office. Oh, and weeding the garden, petting our cats, and watching the lightning bugs sparkle damp evenings with their glow.



The Avian Aqua Miser is an automatic chicken waterer. The majority of our income now comes from sales of these waterers. Visit [www.avianaquamiser.com](http://www.avianaquamiser.com) for more information.



*Just so this chart doesn't give the nitpickers among you fits --- for bookkeeping purposes, I divide the year up into 13 "months" of four weeks each. That keeps the length of each month even so I can see trends more easily.*

## The ephemeral

We'll spend the rest of this book giving you step by step instructions on building a microbusiness, so that's enough of the nitty gritty for now. Instead, let's talk about some more ephemeral qualities of a homestead microbusiness. Do you really have what it takes to succeed?

We talked about drive in chapter 1, but of course you need more than that or everyone would have fled the rat race. I chalk 50% of our success up to teamwork. If you have a significant other, he or she needs to be supportive. It's vital that

you have a clear channel of communication so you can both stay on the same page. In fact, the whole family needs to be on board. Starting a microbusiness isn't an easy row to hoe, and you might be tempted to throw in the towel around month two if you don't have anyone to back you up.

Chances are that once you start building your microbusiness team, you'll discover that every member brings different traits to the table, all of which will combine to make your project a success. I know that we couldn't have made it without Mark's imagination and my business sense. Find your strengths and weaknesses, and if necessary reach outside the family to fill each niche.

I won't lie and tell you that being part of a team doesn't take some work, but I can honestly say that our microbusiness has made our relationship stronger (and more fun.) Working together as a couple every day lets us build on each other's strengths, talk about little problems before they become hair-pulling disasters, and steal kisses. We've been together for six years, and we're still in that disgusting honeymoon stage where bystanders need to suck on a lemon to cut down the sweetness level. If you're considering couple's therapy, why not start a microbusiness together instead? As long as you don't kill each other first, you'll come out a stronger unit, ready to enjoy the adventure together.

### ***Chapter 3: Anatomy of failure***

If you're like me, your biggest reason not to quit your job and strike out on your own is probably fear of failure. What if you don't make a go of it? What will happen to you and to everyone who depends on you if your microbusiness fails?

Now's a good time to make a list of what would really happen. It's easy to assume that you'll starve to death, but given current

low food prices (and your sudden eligibility for food stamps), starvation is only a very remote possibility. You might lose your fancy car, though, or not save as much toward retirement this year as you'd hoped.

Chances are that once you take a good hard look at the consequences of failure, you'll realize...they just aren't so bad. If you've got enough get-up-and-go to start a microbusiness, then you'd probably be able to find another job pretty quickly even if your microbusiness went bust.

And just think of what you can learn from a good failure. We ran through several microbusinesses before settling on our chicken waterer invention, and each failure taught us something about ourselves and what we wanted to do with our lives. The trick was knowing when to cut our losses, and in some cases when to stop making money if we just didn't enjoy the work. As long as you stay tuned to your own limitations and are willing to roll with little failures here and there, each setback can become a part of the learning process. Just think --- you're that much closer to independence!