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# Worm Farmer's Dream

## Don Dodson's invertebrate millions may wiggle dollars out of the dung

### COMMERCIAL FISHERMAN

Don Dodson has more than a million worms wiggling around his backyard, and that makes him a happy man.

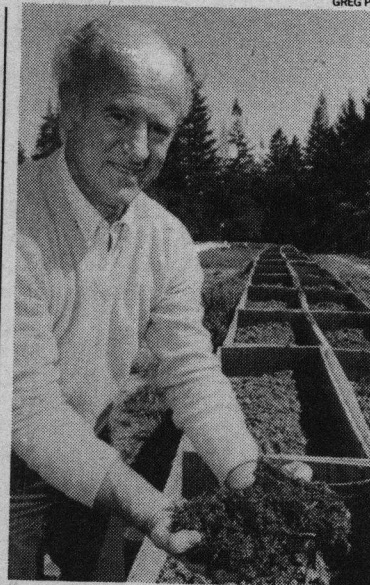
Dodson started out two years ago to turn the slimy two-inch invertebrates' "castings" into a \$100,000-a-year industry. He's a long way from reaching that goal, but he remains confident that his dream will come true as soon as he can find someone to help with the workload.

"This has gotten out of hand," said Dodson, gazing over his 152 worm beds. "I've gotta get someone to help me. This is a seven-day-a-week job; it's a lot of hard work."

Dodson, who has some \$10,000 invested in the operation, cautioned that worm farming is not the easy way to riches that some "shysters" were promising people several years ago. To be a worm farmer, you need to have the muscles and the stomach to gather truckloads of fresh horse manure to feed your stock.

You also need a place to store the horse manure, a place for the castings, an irrigation system for the summer, a good-sized piece of land, and an incredible invention called a worm harvester.

"You'll have to get a harvester before you can harvest your first pound of worms," said Dodson, who ships worms for \$9 per pound across



GREG PIO

**Dodson: "Could you imagine pulling 1,000 worms by hand?"**

the country. "Could you imagine pulling 1,000 worms by hand? That's \$4.50 for three hours' work."

A more valuable commodity than the worms are the critters' castings, which Dodson claims is the finest organic fertilizer available. Dodson has truckloads of the rich black material in his yard waiting to sell to local gardeners as the spring planting season arrives.

For home gardeners who don't want to go to Empire Grade to pick up a load of worm castings, Dodson can set up starter beds for individuals. A worm bed makes an ideal way to keep a continuous top-notch compost pile going with a minimum of care.

"Put everything from your kitchen sink right in on top of the worms and put a piece of carpet over them (to shield them from light)," said Dodson. "Make sure you keep them moist."

To illustrate the beneficial impacts of worm castings, Dodson gave a tour of his large garden fertilized entirely with the rich mulch. There was no argument that Dodson's worms have green thumbs.

While Dodson encourages people to start their own worm beds for home use, he stressed that worm farming should be kept on a small scale unless you're prepared to make it a full-time job.

"I have been discouraged a couple of times," said Dodson, whose wife encourages him to stay with the enterprise. "What am I supposed to do on my vacation, come home and take care of worms?" •