



Sometimes, it just doesn't hurt to ask for what you want. ¶ Before he deployed to Vietnam, Ron Mellon approached the farmer whose land he worked and asked to buy it. The farmer said, "Yes." When Ron asked his wife, Diana, to marry him, she agreed, and the couple exchanged vows in 1971. ¶ Then, in 2007, a couple admired the Mellons' newly constructed barn and asked if they could get married in it. It was Ron and Diana's turn to say "Yes," together. That last "Yes" sparked a new venture on the couple's Lawson, Mo., farm:

## *a booming barn wedding business* and a terrific example of how many farmers have developed non-farm means of generating income on their land.

After management and production, land payments, equipment purchases and employing seasonal help, producers and their families often decide to seek out additional revenue streams. Sometimes, it may be agritourism or hunting leases, or even niche markets. For the Mellons, it's weddings.

And when asked about the business' start, both Diana and Ron sort of shrug. "It just kind of happened," Diana says.

Adds Ron with a chuckle: "That thing was an accident."

What wasn't an accident was the time, effort and thought the Mellons put into the business.

Over the past few years, the style of wedding ceremonies has shifted. Take a peek at Pinterest or any bridal magazine to see simpler, more casual wedding ceremonies and receptions, which are replacing more formal affairs. And barns—those iconic structures that dot the countryside, those odes to a brand of Americana people wish to preserve—

can offer the warm, rustic charm and back-to-basics feel many couples crave.

But even rustic, on-farm weddings can command hefty price tags. According to [theweddingreport.com](http://theweddingreport.com), an average wedding in 2014 in the U.S. cost \$28,000. Overall, weddings are a whopping \$54-billion-a-year industry in the U.S. alone, and \$5 billion in Canada. Then, consider that the Bridal Association of America reports 47% of all 2012 weddings were held outside of a church, 35% of which were outdoors. That adds up to a considerable slice of the proverbial wedding cake.

### **BUILD A BARN & THEY WILL COME**

Ron and Diana know farming. They run anywhere from 180 to 200 head of Angus-cross cattle, chop silage, rake hay, and raise corn and beans on their rolling 300 acres. Sons Rodney, 41, and Ryan, 39, run their own cow/calf herds nearby.

In 2007, the Mellons erected a handsome cherry-red barn perched on a swath of neatly manicured >>