Mushrooms

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The production cycle begins with a two-week period in which compost is made with horse or chicken manure, straw, and cottonseed meal. The compost is spread in shallow trays for eight weeks of in-bed preparation and growing. The beds are heated to 140 degrees Fahrenheit to keep the atmosphere in the bed it will be spread to the garden. The beds will be six layers deep, 64 feet long and 1 1/4 feet wide. The annual yield will be 80,000 pounds a year. The price to wholesalers and grocery chains has been between 75 cents and 90 cents a pound.

Williamson's company, Gourmet Fresh Mushroom Inc., will grow the popular cultivated white mushroom, Agaricus bisporus, and a few meaty brown Shiitake, or Lentinus edodes, mushroom.

He said he hoped to pick his first crop around Christmas and to have 125 people on the payroll and be selling 20,000 pounds a week by the end of the year. It's a labor-intensive business, he said. "It's all hand-picked."