



Christmas Wish Lists for Hobby Farmers

The items that end up on the wish lists for hobby farmers seem to differ a bit from their city-dwelling kin: tractors, llamas and wells usurp DVD players, clothes and jewelry.

Compiled by Cherie Langlois

The other day I saw these petite, Poinsettia-red tractors sitting in a lot by the freeway, decked out with backhoe and front loader. I don't even know what kind they were, but they looked adorable and visions of all the backbreaking work one would save us around the farm danced in my head.

If Santa thinks a tractor would be too expensive or mean too much time spent tinkering with it, I'll settle for a stocking full of chocolate." As the season of giving approaches with the relentless speed of Santa's turbo-sleigh, one's thoughts naturally turn to unnaturally long lists of the people you have yet to buy or make presents for: kids, spouse, parents, grandparents, friends, teachers, garbage hauler, the veterinarian who handled a midnight lambing emergency and so on.

For those of us who participate in the tradition of holiday gift-giving, this is a time to selflessly show our love and appreciation to the people (and animals) we care about, to the folks who are important in our lives and to those who have little or nothing.

We, of course, expect nothing in return.

OK, that's a flat-out lie. I don't know about you, but Santa better have something for me in his sleigh, too, or I'll be pouting big-time.

It doesn't have to be anything huge or expensive (although a tractor would be most appreciated and useful, too; see my bio), just a token to show that somebody (and you know who you are) put some thought into what I might like. Because, you know, it's the thought that counts.

But enough about me. I thought it would be fascinating—and fun—to find out what a handful of farmers like you want most for Christmas. Do farmers, I wondered, wish for the usual holiday gifts squashed into variety stores and malls this time of year: perfume and jewelry, coffee mugs and robes, DVDs and CDs? Not likely, as it turns out.

Santa, please take note.

Trisha Tank tends registered black Angus, dairy goats, rare poultry, mini-donkeys and horses with the help of her farm collies (and husband Aaron!) on Bilrite Farms in northwestern Minnesota. "All I want for Christmas this year is a skid steer! Why a skid steer you might ask? Well, why not?"

After talking to neighbors and other farmers who have one, it seems that a skid steer is the new 'hired hand.' It can clean lots; landscape; and move hay, dirt, rock, fence panels and more. A skid steer can get into tight spaces our large tractor can't and it's lighter so, with the spring thaw, it offers longer maneuverability around the farm as the frost comes out of the ground.

Yes indeed, a skid steer would make for a very nice present and if Santa can't fit it into his sled in December, perhaps he can pass along my request to the Easter Bunny?"

Dee Heinrich and her daughter Ashleigh, of Peeper Hollow Farm in Marion, Iowa, spend a large hunk of their 24-hour days producing award-winning, coated fleeces for hand spinners from their flocks of Romney and California Variegated Mutant sheep. "What we want for Christmas is 365 extra hours—an average of about one hour for each day of the coming year.

These would be hours that are totally free to use as we see fit; not 'free time' or 'work time' or anything-in-particular time. We would no longer be able to say, 'I've just run out of time!'—we could withdraw what we needed for the day to attend to wherever we had fallen short.

Just imagine all that we could do with an extra hour in every twenty-four!"



“Having had trials and tribulations with predators recently, I suppose a Great Pyrenees guardian dog or guard donkey would be at the top of my Christmas list—we’ve had bobcats and skunks reaching under the wire of our mobile pens at night and eating our broiler chickens.

Then I can live more in harmony with the predators and they can learn to get their food elsewhere.”

Paul Hain, of John Hain & Sons, and his wife Leticia raise certified organic broiler chickens and turkeys amidst an 80-acre organic walnut orchard in Tres Pinos, Calif.

Carol Ann Sayle, along with her husband Larry Butler, nurtures a colorful variety of USDA-certified organic vegetables and bling-free chickens on Boggy Creek Farm, which actually encompasses two farms in and near Austin, Texas. “What I want for Christmas is: a total ban on a mandatory National Animal Identification System (NAIS), which would require hobby farmers to RFID [radio frequency ID] 100 or so free-range chickens.

Hens, unlike human ladies, do not want to wear any ‘jewelry’ at all! And we don’t want to pay thousands of dollars a year for the ‘privilege’ of keeping chickens. After all, the Constitution gives us the RIGHT to keep chickens and this right should not be infringed upon by anybody, with the exception of the occasional raccoon or opossum.”

“What I want for Christmas is ... a walk-in cooler/refrigerator for my chicken eggs. Right now I keep the eggs in four or five small refrigerators; I’ve also got eggs in my neighbors’ refrigerators!

It would be so nice to keep them in one spot and to have a big refrigerator with shelves that I could walk into, look at the eggs all at once and stand up in instead of kneeling. It gets to be a pain!”

Denise Anderson, with her husband Cameron and son Peter Beno, markets certified, naturally grown eggs from 400 chickens of 10 different breeds at 2 Silos Farm in Mount Gilead, Ohio. They also tend a home/market garden and small flock of sheep.

Patty Putnam keeps pet dwarf goats on her farm in Wisconsin and markets her self-published book, Basics and Beyond—Goat Care Management, to new goat keepers worldwide as part of her never-ending quest to encourage proper goat care. “What I want for Christmas is always-healthy, well-cared-for goats coast to coast, whether they be backyard pets, show stock, brood stock, production animals or meat or fleece producers ... no matter.

Goats give us back so much more than most of us ever give to them—they are amazing animals!”

“What I’d like for Christmas is ... a new well. Last summer our well ran dry for a few days and we had no backup. We had to get water from the neighbors and the gas station, hauling it in jugs, about 35 gallons at a time.

With all our livestock, water is a big concern right now.”

Robert Turbyfill, Jr., helps his wife Dawn raise rare-breed cattle, ducks, turkeys, chickens and more on Heirloom Heritage Farms in Spanaway, Wash. They also breed alpacas under Cedar Grove Alpacas, LLC.

“What I want for Christmas is the appropriate amount of rain for our area—spread out over 12 months.

What I don’t want is so much rain that Glory [one of our goats, at left] has to don her life jacket when the creek starts to rise—or the drought we’ve suffered through for the past 18 months or so.

For the past several years, we’ve either had flooding or drought; I want moderation!

Ken, on the other hand, would simply like to receive the winning multimillion dollar [\$100 million or better] lottery ticket. He envisions attending the production sales like Showstopper knowing he could buy all the goats there if he chose to and building a state-of-the-art, self-cleaning goat barn in order to allow the goats to live in the manner they would like to become accustomed to.”

Pat and Ken Motes raise South African Boer goats for breeding and show. on Clear Creek Farms in Fall River, Tenn.

“At the top of my Christmas list would be one more llama, but I don’t think my husband would go for that, so I’m going to have to drop a hint about a new-and-improved microscope for checking our llamas’ fecals.



We've been regularly performing our own fecal checks for about a year and have learned a lot about our llamas' parasites. I have to refocus often with my current [mid-price range] microscope and it would be easier to use one like my veterinarian has."

Marilyn Nenni and her husband Jim keep around 45 to 50 llamas for show and breeding at Shagbark Ridge Llamas in Noblesville, Ind. As 4-H leaders, the pair helped their llama club fund construction of a spacious llama barn at their local fairgrounds this year. This article first appeared in the November/December 2007 issue of Hobby Farms magazine. Pick up a copy at your local newsstand or tack and feed store.

About the Author

Cherie Langlois is an HF contributing editor who tends a 5-acre farm in Graham, Wash.