



All-terrain Farming

ATVs offer benefits to farmers; ongoing farm tasks are no match for an ATVs versatility

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Honda introduced the first ATVs in the early 1970s for the recreation market, but it didn't take farmers and ranchers long to realize that these "toys" had serious workhorse potential. Search for "ATV accessories" online, and you'll get more than a million links to choose from.

Add "agriculture" to your search terms, and you still pick up several hundred thousand links.

Take your pick from mowers, carts, tillage tools, snow movers, manure spreaders, sprayers or seeders.

Add a rear-mount three-point hitch to your ATV, and virtually any Category 1 attachment designed for garden or subcompact tractors can be used.

Rick took the ATV on a tour of the farm and field; see how it did. Working Around the Farm
How did the ATVs hold up?

Working in the Field
Can you seed with an ATV?

Got Weeds?
Find out if an ATV can help battle weeds

Ground-drive units like manure spreaders are natural add-ons for an ATV, but mowers and tow behinds are commonly equipped with their own gas engines.

Small hydraulic pumps and electro-hydraulic actuators that run off the ATV's electric harness provide convenient lifting power that was once available only on full-sized tractors.

Swisher Inc. has been building ATV attachments for more than 20 years.

Today, they offer a variety of lawn- and land-care, tillage, and materials-handling attachments—even snow throwers and tire chains.

Company president Wayne Swisher says the newer, larger-displacement, higher-horsepower machines are accelerating innovation.

"The increased power allows you to do things that are more interesting and more challenging," he says. "People are getting more and more creative in how they are using ATVs."

One trend that Swisher sees only getting stronger with the current economic climate is single-purchase, multiple-use attachments, such as the company's QuickSwitch system for front and rear mounting of eight different attachments.

"People are looking for a variation on the one-use item and seeing more value in a single item that offers multiple uses," he says. "With one mounting kit, you can set up for tillage, snow removal or gravel spreading, whatever the need may be."

While options are expanding rapidly, what you can safely use and how you can safely use it will depend in large part on the ATV model and also on the size of the operator.

Dennis Murphy, Pennsylvania State University professor and extension safety specialist, advises that no load exceed the weight of the driver and machine. Rear racks should never be loaded with more than one third of the ATV's weight.

How you distribute your weight on an ATV has a large impact on control and stability. Add an attachment, and an



operator's weight distribution has even more importance. Murphy warns that just because an adult of a given weight can control an ATV and equipment without a problem, it doesn't mean that a child or even a lighter-weight adult can do the same.

He also cautions against youths and inexperienced operators using ATVs for towing loads and equipment such as mowers.

"It's usually a combination of things that people don't anticipate ... a little too fast, hitch a little too loose, too tight a turn or hit a hole and lose traction. All these things come together in an instant, and bad things happen," he notes.

"Rear over-turns can be caused by attempting to tow too heavy a load up a slope, and heavy loads can push ATVs with an increased risk of jack-knifing, sliding out of control or being rolled over."

He advises, when evaluating an ATV for work potential, that you consider braking capacity and gear ratio for pulling power, as well as rated weight capacity on front and rear racks and suspension.

When mounting attachments, suspension lockouts may be necessary. However, these must be removed if an ATV is to be operated at higher speeds over rough ground, as they limit handling and response.

Swisher emphasizes discussing possible uses with the dealer before you buy. "They can give you a good read on the machine's effectiveness in a given application," he says. "Spend time on the Internet, as well. There is a lot of information out there."

- Jim Ruen

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