



Tough Times Call for Innovative Measures

In a tough economy and at a pivotal time in our country's energy history, Hobby Farms' editor in chief, Karen K. Acevedo, spoke with representatives of outdoor equipment during the recent GIE+Expo.

11/5/2008

By Karen K. Acevedo

Kubota, an "engine company first," is in tune with emissions and fuel efficiency. Check out its new standard tractor, the B3200HSD.

Agri-Fab's new SmartLINK series saves major storage space by eliminating multiple platforms and allowing you to change from one lawn implement to another in seconds without any tools.

This battery-operated multipurpose cultivator (the TB 1000) is one new green-minded product offered Husqvarna. Photos by Karen K. Acevedo and courtesy Agri-Fab and Husqvarna

The 2008 Green Industry and Equipment Expo (GIE + Expo) was held in Louisville, Ky., October 23-25, with hundreds of vendors present and outdoor power equipment on display as far as the eye could see.

In a tough economy and at a pivotal time in our country's energy history, Hobby Farms' editor in chief, Karen K. Acevedo, spoke with representatives from some of the most well-known equipment brands to find out what was on their minds.

Save Money: Do It Yourself

With today's consumer proceeding cautiously and sometimes frugally, some outdoor equipment could be considered a luxury.

But is it?

"Anything that promotes DIY lawn care is a must-own piece of equipment these days," says Mark Short, Vice President of Marketing/Product Development at Agri-Fab in Sullivan, Ill. "You don't have to pay someone to do it."

Recognizing that landscaping is a function of discretionary income, manufacturers are coming up with ways to enhance their products' appeal.

In addition to several push-behind products, Agri-Fab manufactures and sells various lawn and pasture attachments that work with riding mowers, ATVs, and utility vehicles alike; they can be used for landscaping, as well as on the "rough parts" of a farm, says Short.

Agri-Fab's new SmartLINK series was designed with economy of space in mind as well; you purchase the base unit, which comes with a master platform and a plug aerator, and you can then change out the aerator with other oft-used attachments using the same base, including a tine dethatcher, a blade aerator and a poly roller.

The genius is that you save major square footage in your garage, barn or storage shed by eliminating multiple platforms, and the system couldn't be easier to operate. With the flip of a hinge, you're changing from one lawn implement to another in seconds without any tools.

According to Short, the company conducted focus groups and then went back to the plant to come up with products that really addressed customer concerns. Storage space was number one; packaging and in-store merchandising was another.

Agri-Fab's new look for product packages, hang tags and in-store displays is bolder, easier to understand and consumer friendly with product images and descriptions, and bright colors that "speak consumer language."

In addition to product merchandising, Agri-Fab's website has also added new elements to help consumers throughout and after the buying process. www.agri-fab.com features in-use product videos and the ability to find a product by searching according to task or type.



Top

Built to Last: Buy Quality

When your wallet isn't as fat as it was a year ago, but you still need a piece of outdoor equipment here and there to maintain your farm, what considerations should you make?

Over and over, the answer I heard was "buy quality."

"In this economy, people are looking to buy premium equipment that is going to last for many years without breaking down," says Barbara Zerfoss, Vice President of Brand Marketing at Husqvarna, in Charlotte, N.C.

Premium equipment is an investment, but that investment will pay off in the long run.

"Husqvarna is a professional-quality equipment company, so durability has been built in," says Zerfoss.

Peggy Horkan, Marketing & Communications Manager for Kubota Tractor Corp., in Torrance, Calif., echoes the "quality" sentiment.

"Kubota has always been an engine company first, so our engines are durable and have been engineered for efficiency," says Horkan.

According to Horkan, consumers are more selective in a down economy, and they look to buy products they'll be proud to own.

Top

Long-Term Vision: Green Products

Caring for the environment is once again at the forefront of many consumers' minds and manufacturers are making products that appeal to the "green" minded.

Husqvarna had an immense variety of new products (more than 80 to be exact) on display at GIE + Expo.

According to Husqvarna, today's customers are looking for quality products that are more and more innovative—ergonomic, environmentally responsible, and more productive.

With those principles in mind, they unveiled a few new green products at the show including a battery-operated multipurpose cultivator (the TB 1000) that offers the performance of a gasoline-powered engine with a cleaner and quieter user experience; a fully robotic mower (the Automower Solar Hybrid) that is partly powered by the sun and uses no fuel or oil; and finally, for those old-schoolers, a push reel mower (the 540 Novolette) that is silent, easy to maneuver, requires no oil or gas and of course, puts out zero emissions. Don't overlook the workout factor as well!

Even Husqvarna's chainsaws give a nod to greener pastures with their X-Torq engines putting out 60 percent lower emissions and consuming 20 percent less fuel.

Constantly fluctuating gas prices are causing consumers to question manufacturers for the first time about fuel efficiency.

With Kubota being an "engine company first," they have always been in tune with emissions and fuel efficiency.

"Our diesel engines are very fuel efficient and over time, the customer should see a fairly significant savings on gas," says Horkan.

Kubota's new standard tractor, the B3200HSD, features a smooth-running 32HP, 4-cylinder, liquid-cooled diesel engine with Kubota's E-TVCS (three-vortex combustion system) for increased power, high torque and cleaner emissions.

It complies with EPA tier 3 emissions regulations that call for an approximate 65 percent reduction in particulate matter and a 60 percent reduction in oxides of nitrogen from 1996 levels.

Changes are happening in the industry and by all accounts, they appear to be heading in the right direction.

About the Author: Karen K. Acevedo is editor in chief of Hobby Farms, Hobby Farm Home and the Popular Farming



Series. She also is the author of Cooking with Heirlooms.

[Top](#)