



Tractor Talk from Farm Show

Farm tractor manufacturers focus on customer education, relationships, comfort.

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The 2008 National Farm Machinery Show held in Louisville, Ky., February 13-16, was as big as ever with numerous tractor manufacturers among the more than 800 vendors present--and some of the most impressive farm tractors and machinery you will ever see.

Hobby Farms editors talked with representatives from some of the most well-known tractor brands to see what topics were hot on their minds.

Priority: Customer-Dealer Relationships

If it's your first time buying a tractor, your dealer wants to help you make the right decision--in the store and after the tractor is delivered to your farm.

The reps we spoke with described various methods—from customer clinics to step-by-step literature (including basic tractor terminology)—by which they support continuing education for customers.

A big factor in customer education is developing—and improving--the relationship between dealers and customers.

Today's hobby farmers expect a high level of customer service and tractor companies are responding by educating their dealers, refurbishing dealerships and offering high-tech tools to make the buying process more pleasant.

Barry Nelson (right), Public Relations - Agricultural Equipment Manager with John Deere, talks with Karri Sandino, associate web editor with Hobby Farms, about John Deere's efforts to reach out to hobby farmers. Bryan Zent is Segmentation Application Marketing Manager for Bobcat, which is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year. "We understand that small-farm owners need education about their tractors."

Ongoing dealer training programs, as well as plentiful online training for customers are available.

"We're also working toward a retail atmosphere at our dealerships," says Zent, which includes expanded store hours, making it easier for hobby farmers to stop by after work or on the weekends.

Ron Parrish, Market Development Manager at Kioti, a company which has specialized in compact farm tractors since 1986, says, "Dealer education extends to tractor safety and care. We train our dealers to teach buyers how to safely operate, repair and maintain an efficient tractor from the time they buy throughout their ownership of the tractor."

Tom Patterson, Vice President of Marketing and Sales, with Montana, which also specializes in compact tractors, says, "Our whole line is adapted for the hobby farmer. We understand their needs and wants. And we understand that people still buy from people. Our dealers are trained to help our tractor owners with any problems; we want to help them feel ease with their tractors."

Online Tools Guide Your Decision

Many tractor manufacturers' websites offer fun tools that can quickly determine what type of tractor you need--or offer a way to "build" your tractor from the ground up.

Kubota's Susan Holmes, Marketing Support Manager, says, "We have tractors that can do all of your jobs and can be set up with the implements you need, too. In fact, our website has a tractor configuration tool that can help you select



what other parts or implements can be added to that tractor."

Over at New Holland, which has been in the tractor business since 1895, Scott Myrick, sales manager, says, "Today's customer wants to know more about what they are going to buy, so our website offers videos about the different features of our tractors and an interactive tractor configuration tool."

A New In-store Shopping Experience

Tractor dealerships have historically been devoid of bells and whistles, but not so for the future. Many manufacturers will be moving toward a more retail-oriented shopping experience in an effort to make today's tractor buyer more comfortable.

Steve Gorsuch, Massey Ferguson's Director of Rural Lifestyle Marketing, says, "We're all about helping customers make the right choices--plus, we want to help the hobby farmer live their dream; we understand their passion. We help our dealerships understand that it's not just about the sale," but about what happens after the sale related to service and maintenance."

John Deere also has a customer-focused approach. "Our dealers are holding open houses to introduce our tractors in a welcoming setting," says John Deere's Barry Nelson, Public Relations - Agricultural Equipment Manager. "We also offer mowing clinics for women to give them hands-on experience with the tractors."

Tractors Designed for Comfort

We're used to creature comforts in our cars, homes and offices, so when you're working the land with a tractor in rough weather or on rough terrain, who wouldn't mind a little comfort?

Tractor manufacturers have designed their products with as much (or more) ergonomic detail as a Herman Miller office chair.

Tipping steering wheels, adjustable seats with shock absorbers, and levers and handles have been designed to be accessible to drivers of all sizes, particularly women who often have smaller hands.

Consoles have also been designed to more closely resemble an automobile's dashboard, making it more user friendly and recognizable to the lay user.

During a chat with Branson sales manager Scott Boughtman, he says, "We've redesigned the operator station to be more convenient, with an emphasis on comfort and on making the transition from car to tractor easier." He says Branson is continually improving its dealer education activities and online educational tools for customers.

Energy independence is another hot topic in tractor manufacturing today.

Most manufacturer's tractor engines are now approved for biodiesel; others are headed in that direction soon. Overall, modern tractor engines comply with the highest levels of engine efficiency.

Bottom line: Expect a positive experience when buying from the guys or gals at your chosen dealership.