

The Next Level of Productivity

Modern technology revolutionizes farming practices in Delaware

BY JENNIFER ANTONIK

MODERN TRACTORS look similar to their antique counterparts from the outside. But on the inside, many of them have seen high-tech upgrades that will change the course of agriculture.

While the number of people facing food insecurity continues to increase due to the pandemic, farmers and ag-professionals are working behind the scenes to increase productivity with the help of innovative technology.

“Technology is really revolutionizing the way we run our businesses, which eventually affects the bottom line for consumers,” said Jim Palermo of Trap Woods, Inc. in Georgetown.

Palermo provides crop scouting or field scouting services to farmers, helping to identify problem areas. He used to scout with “boots on the ground,” but now benefits from drones, satellite imagery and other technology, allowing him and his clients to see the crops from a “birds-eye view.”

“It streamlines everything and makes things faster. We can send images through a smartphone or Dropbox. Now, when farmland is consolidating into fewer farmers and more operations on larger acreage, the farmers can most assuredly be more productive,” he said, adding that it also helps with accuracy and improved samples.

Don Jackson of Ag Industrial in Dover sells larger farm equipment and said the technology embedded in each tractor is almost prescriptive in nature and tailored to the farmer’s needs.

“Most tractors now come equipped with their own computer hardware and software, which helps optimize the farming operation,” he added.

Farmers are now able to map their fields, providing them more precision when applying fertilizer and planting crops, for example. It can also help with irrigation control, speed and fuel conservation, soil testing and many other farm-specific needs.

Tasks such as those described used to take a farmer hours to deal with and came with a higher possibility of failed testing; now those same tasks can be completed in minutes from inside their tractor. The same is true for possible repairs needed. Tractors with this level of technology can display errors on the

dashboard or screen and can often be fixed with the help of a phone call from a trained technician, saving a farmer days, if not more, in repair costs.

“The savings can eventually add up and be passed down to the consumer,” explained Jackson.

Before savings are calculated, however, farmers must purchase their new modern tractor with the software that fits their needs. Tractors that were previously purchased decades ago for \$16,999 for smaller equipment or \$80,000 for larger equipment could now cost \$80,000 or more than \$200,000, respectively. Even so the savings from modern technology usually outweigh the investment.

“The tech advances so quickly, it’s hard to keep up it with sometimes,” said Bruce Esham of Westwood Farms, Inc. in Millsboro. “But it’s necessary. If you go into some of these control rooms, it will surprise you what connects to what around the farm.”

Esham deals with grain storage, dryers, and material handling practices. He said technology has greatly impacted his business right along with the farmers.

“It used to be that installing a 25,000-bushel tank was big. Now, we’re installing 80,000 to 100,000-bushel tanks. Technology has just helped us become more efficient. We even have smartphone apps that tell farmers what their dryer is doing so they can feel comfortable moving on to something else. They can shut that dryer off from inside their tractor if they need to,” he said. “Safety is a big thing. Farmers know they want to live to see another day. This tech helps them with efficiency and safety, not to mention the financial benefits.” ■



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