

Valuing Value

More than ever, growers are seeking high quality and dependability in planting equipment.



Photo courtesy of Mechanical Transplanter

A carousel transplanter, Model 5000WD, from Mechanical Transplanter has all the features of the Model 5000, plus the patented float-wheel direct drive.

By David Eddy
Senior Western Editor

WHEN it comes to what growers are looking for in planting equipment, the answer is really quite simple, says Lynn Graham. "They want a cheap version of the one that costs \$10,000," says Graham, the sales manager at Buckeye Tractor of Columbus Grove, OH.

Seriously, though they might not want to shell out for top quality, growers are increasingly demanding it. The reason is pretty simple, says Graham: Planting in plastic mulch is expensive. As more and more growers seek the many benefits of plastic mulch, such as weed suppression, water conservation, etc., they need equipment that meshes. "The driving force is plastic mulch, that and drip tape," says Graham. "There's more and more demand."

Graham currently markets a water wheel planter, which allows transplanting through plastic, but adds that Buckeye hopes to soon start working on equipment that will direct seed through plastic. He hopes they can come up with an accessible system. "Right now, direct

seeding through plastic is expensive," he says. "Smaller growers have trouble affording it."

James Renaldo of Renaldo Sales and Service of North Collins, NY, agrees that such equipment is expensive — but that hasn't cut demand. "I'd say 95% of people want equipment that goes through plastic, and half of them are making their first go into plastic," he says.

However, Renaldo cautions those

growers who are new to plastic to make their equipment decisions carefully. "Many want a cheap planter that goes into plastic mulch," he says, "but cheap isn't necessarily good."

Renaldo, who came out with his first planter that works with plastic mulch exactly two decades ago, says growers also need to make sure their machines are versatile. It's particularly important for growers who are considering diversification, citing one of his biggest customers as an example. "He's got a lot of crops, a lot of bed types," says Renaldo, adding that the planter works on all of them. "He can plant melons in the morning and tomatoes in the afternoon."

Systematic Approach

Before making a decision on a planter, Ralph Moore of Market Farm Implementation of Friedens, PA, says growers need to consider every aspect of their operation. For example, Moore says he's heard from some growers who want to go to extra-narrow spacing to increase per-acre yields, but they haven't thought it through. "If you do that, you'll have to do hand-weeding," he says. "It's easier to hand-plant than it is to hand-weed."

Moore, who used to farm himself, consults with growers so they don't



The Renaldo 6-row transplanter plants through plastic mulch covered beds at approximately one plant per second, per planting head.

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Photo courtesy of Renaldo Sales And Service

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make such mistakes. To continue with the preceding example, he says a grower shouldn't buy a planter without a cultivator. "It's all based on a production system," he says. "They're not just buying a planter, they're investing in a production system."

In consulting with a grower, Moore says he tries to find out everything about the operation, such as the number of acres, etc. "We go over their entire system," he says. "We don't sell them a planter until we know exactly what they're doing."

Precision Decision

Precision planting comes up a lot in conversations Darrell Lemmon of Starco Manufacturing has with growers. "It seems like everyone's looking for planters that will narrow the row width so they can get more plants per acre," says Lemmon, who is based in Casper, WY. "Growers are also becoming more interested in planters with disc-type openers that will cut through any trash left in the field."

Lemmon says his company is now



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working on a double-disk planter that will enable growers to achieve narrower spacing. "Now we can get 10 inches or even 8 inches," he says. "But we want to go down even more. For example, on onions, we could get down to 4- and 5-inch rows."

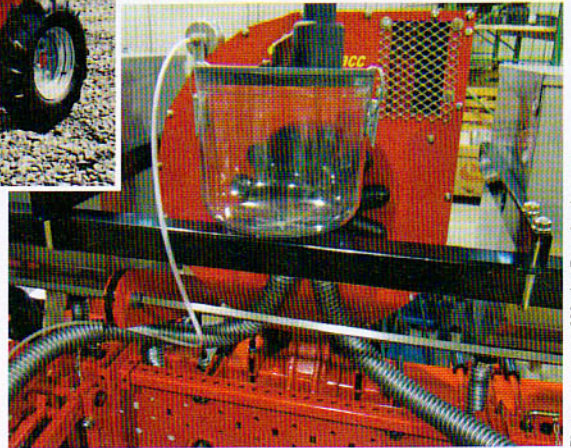
Growers have always been interested in precision planting to some degree, says Lemmon. It's just that in the past, it was not so much about narrower rows, as it was about precise spacing within the rows. "The plant populations should have no

doubles, no skips," he says. "It's all about economics — they want to buy planters that are dependable."

Dependability is indeed a key attribute in planting equipment, agrees Dave Fountain of Solex Corp., which is located in Dixon, CA. As growers seek to cut costs, they are increasingly taking a closer look at the maintenance costs of their equipment. "That comes up a lot," he says. "It's OK for components to wear out — as long as they are readily available and don't cost an arm and a leg."

Another area where costs are going up for

The new optional feature on the MaterMacc Model 8200 from Market Farm Implement is a vacuum seed clean out canister (below) to vacuum out the seed from the planter. In addition, the Easy Set Toolbar System allows growers to quickly change row spacings by pulling a pin and sliding the row units to the row spacing desired without tools.



growers — seed — is also affecting the planting equipment industry. Fountain says that growers are keenly interested in uniformity because they don't want to waste a single seed. If seed costs go up too much more, the effect on the industry could be huge. "The higher the seed costs," he says, "the more the grower eyes transplanters." **AVG**

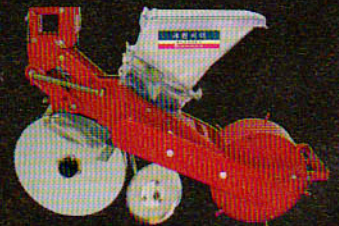
Direct comments or questions about this article to deddy@meistermedia.com.

Photos courtesy of Market Farm Implement

New South Korean Import

ONE of the few truly new products to hit the market recently is a seeder from Jang Automation of South Korea. Imported into North America by Mechanical Transplanter Co. of Holland, MI, the planter has been extremely well-received, says Mechanical Transplanter's Dan Timmer. Part of the reason for the success, says Timmer, is that the unit can plant seed of virtually any size. "From tiny turnip seed all the way up to corn," he says.

In addition, because the seeder is available in push style as well as tool bar style, it works well for planting smaller plots. Also, the turnaround time from one packet of seed to another is extremely brief, says Timmer. "It works well for growers who are diversified," he says. "And I'll bet we've sold a good portion (of the units) to seed companies."



Mechanical Transplanter imported a new seeder from Jang Automation in South Korea. It is available in hand-push and tractor mounted.

Starco Manufacturing's Milton Precision Planter can seed virtually everything from asparagus to sweet corn. The simplicity of the ground-driven Milton Planter complement the most precise mechanical planter in the industry.

Photo courtesy of Starco Manufacturing