

**Editor's Notebook**



**Mark Newhall**  
Editor & Publisher

**Rubber Track Problems**

FARM SHOW editors have recently fielded a number of complaints about problems with rubber tracks made by Goodyear, the St. Mary's, Ohio, rubber company.

Goodyear rubber tracks are used on the new Deere 8000 Series tractors and on the new Case-IH Quad tractor, as well as on a number of add-on track systems offered by after-market manufacturers.

Spokesmen for both Deere and Case-IH told FARM SHOW they're unaware of any quality problems with the Goodyear tracks. They say the biggest problem they have is building enough tracked tractors to keep up with demand.

But some after-market manufacturers say they've been dealing with Goodyear track failures for years.

Dennis Wilkinson of La Grande, Oregon, runs Omnitrac, a company that makes rubber track systems to fit virtually any piece of farm equipment.

"We've been complaining about the quality of Goodyear tracks ever since we started in the track business. Goodyear has repeatedly assured us that quality problems were corrected but they never have been," Wilkinson said. "Traction lugs fall off in the field and new tracks crack apart right here in the shop.

"What's worse is that once Goodyear got contracts to supply tracks to Case-IH and Deere, they simply left us after-market manufacturers to twist in the wind on both the warranty and supply sides. They've told me to tell the farmer with a problem to park his machine for a year until they can get around to us. Since that's preposterous, I've been replacing Goodyear tracks with Firestone tracks at my own expense. We could sue, but we'd probably be tied up in court for years if we did. Meantime, I'm working closely with Firestone to secure reliable, quality tracks. I'm in the track business for the long haul, but I won't buy another rubber track from Goodyear until they start conducting business responsibly."

Officials at another after-market company, who asked to remain anonymous, told us they have experienced up to a 50 percent track failure rate in as little as 300 hours on their combine rubber track systems. Some problems have been due to design flaws in their carriage systems but many failures have been attributable to the quality of the tracks themselves, the company said. The good news is that all the bad track has been replaced for free and in a timely fashion by Goodyear and track quality has significantly improved recently, the company adds.

For its part, Goodyear insists its main problem is in keeping ahead of demand for its tracks.

"The only significant problem Goodyear is having with its Trackman line of rubber track products is that production simply cannot keep up with demand from both Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEM) and the retrofit market," Rob Andrew, marketing manager for Goodyear's rubber track products, told FARM SHOW.

"We are focusing on expansion to try to keep pace with the growth of this business. Any isolated product performance issues associated with the launch of this new product have been and will continue to be addressed through the close

working relationship between Goodyear and its OEM and replacement manufacturers."

Supply and other problems with the company's tracks may be understandable since it's such a new, fast-growing segment of the industry, notes consultant John Inman, a retired University of California ag engineer.

"Caterpillar had some problems when they first came out with their rubber tracks in the late 1980's," Inman says. "They broke a few tracks on experimental machines, due largely to material getting jammed between the front bogey wheels on turns. They got those problems resolved before they went into commercial production, however.

"I would expect that Goodyear's problems with rubber tracks, if any, are 'growing pains' that will be resolved, too." (Jim Houtsma, Associate Editor)

**Caterpillar's "First" Combine**

By far the hottest new product at farm shows this fall has been Caterpillar's new combine. Huge crowds gather every time the company exhibits the German-built machine.



Photo shows a Caterpillar combine from the early 1900's on display at a recent farm show.

But few people know this isn't the first time Cat has been in the combine business. Between 1886 and 1935, Caterpillar (and its predecessor companies) built combines. In 1925, the C.L. Best Tractor Co. and Holt Caterpillar Co. merged to form Caterpillar Tractor Co. The company continued to make combines until the mid-1930's, when it sold its combine line in order to concentrate on its construction and mining businesses.



Cat's new combine at work.

**Protect Your Future: Sell Your Farm's Development Rights**

A Vermont dairyman and his wife recently joined a growing number of farmers who are protecting the future of their farms by selling off development rights.

John and Elizabeth Webb Roberts, Whiting, Vt., plan to expand their 100-cow operation with the nearly \$250,000 they obtained by selling development rights to their land to a state program that will hold those rights forever.

"We were concerned about urban sprawl gobbling up our farm, as it's done to so many others in our state," Roberts told FARM SHOW. "Fortunately, Vermont has a very active farmland conservation program that allowed us to commit our land to a permanent easement so no one can ever sell the land to build houses on."

Under terms of the program, the land will remain a working farm forever. The Roberts can pass it on to their children or sell it to another farmer.

Getting accepted into the Vermont program is a lengthy process, sometimes taking up to 2 1/2 years. It begins with a phone call to the Vermont Land Trust for an application. A thorough evaluation of the property is then made, which includes characterizing the farm's soil type to make sure it's viable for the long term. Various reviews are then made and an appraisal done, for which the farmer pays half. If accepted into the program - only about half the candidates in Vermont are - the farmer is eligible for a maximum payment of \$250,000 which is taxable as capital gains unless reinvested in the operation.

The program paid the Roberts \$240,000 for 379 acres. Various legal fees and other expenses added up to out-of-pocket expenses of \$2,500.

"We were going to keep farming anyway. This program just allowed us to convert a non-utilized asset into a utilized asset," says Roberts.

While Vermont is not alone in operating such a program, it is leading the U.S. in participation with 100,000 of 400,000 acres nationwide enrolled in that state alone. California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Rhode Island have similar programs in place. Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, and Indiana are close to implementing them.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, John Roberts, Butterwick Farm, R.R. 2, Box 102, Whiting, Vt. 05778 (ph 802 462-2252; fax 2340). For information about participating in, or starting a program in your area, contact: American Farmland Trust, Technical Assistance, Herrick Mill, One Short Street, Northampton, Mass. 01060 (ph 413 586-4593; fax 9332).

**More Church Bulletin Bloopers**

- This being Easter Sunday, we will ask Mrs. Martin to come forward and lay an egg on the altar.
- Next Sunday a special collection will be taken to defray the cost of the new carpet. All those wanting to do something on the new carpet may come forward and do so.
- The flower on the altar this morning is to announce the birth of David Alan Hunter, the sin of Rev. and Mrs. Hunter.

**Some Ag Groups Worry About Tobacco Settlement**

"Officials of some ag groups worry that the social and legal precedents being established in the current campaign against tobacco - a legal commodity - could in the future be turned against the fat and cholesterol in beef, pork, eggs and dairy products," The Des Moines Register newspaper reported recently.

"Where does liability stop and responsibility begin?" asked Al Tank of the National Pork Producers Council. "If you can suggest that consumption of tobacco has a negative impact on health and therefore on medical costs and worker performance, then virtually anything we do in society, including the consumption of meat, could be brought into that discussion."

For example, some lifelong milk drinkers have already sued milk producers, charging the product led to clogged arteries, noted the American Farm Bureau Federation's Richard Newpher.

The campaign against tobacco, which reached a critical mass earlier this year, "can cause an erosion of support for traditional agricultural products," Newpher said.

Others, however, say chances are slim that the tobacco deal will in any way impact producers of other ag commodities.

"You can make the same argument that too much fat (will kill you). But it's a hard argument to make," said Mike McLeod, a Washington, D.C., lawyer who's considered an expert on agricultural law.

The tobacco situation could set a precedent, though a weak one, he said. "To say producers of certain products that are high in undesirable characteristics - say, calories - should be penalized is quite a different step."

**Optimist Or Pessimist?**

The story is told of a father who had twin sons. One son was an optimist, and the other son was a pessimist. On the twins' birthday, while the boys were at school, the father loaded the pessimist's room with every imaginable toy and game.

He loaded the optimist's room with horse manure.

That night, the father passed the pessimist's room and found him sitting amid all his new gifts crying bitterly. "Why are you crying?" the father asked.

"Because my friends will be jealous, I'll have to read all the instructions, the toys constantly need new batteries, and eventually all my new toys will get broken," answered the pessimist.

Passing by the optimist's room, the father found him dancing for joy in the pile of manure. "What are you so happy about?" asked the father. To which the optimist replied, "There's got to be a pony in there somewhere!"

**Never try to impress a woman because if you do she'll expect you to keep up the standard the rest of your life." - W.C. Field**