Zimmerman sometimes buys pickers just for the parts. And if he needs parts that aren't available, he builds his own.

Reuben Zimmerman buys used New Idea corn pickers from farmers and rebuilds them, converting wide row models to narrow row.

Corn Picker Expert Rebuilds Machines, Makes Parts

Even in this age of high-tech farms and big, expensive combines, there are still some farmers harvesting with ear corn pickers. High corn prices have also sparked renewed interest.

But finding machines in good condition can be a problem. New Idea, the biggest manufacturer of ear corn pickers, stopped building units in the late 1970's. No manufacturer makes a new corn picker and most used pickers are set up for 40-in. rows. Finding a narrower machine to match today's row spacings isn't easy.

Reuben Zimmerman, Barnett, Mo., saw the market for rebuilt corn pickers and parts about 10 years ago so he started a business called "Picker Paradise". He buys used New Idea corn pickers from farmers across the U.S. and rebuilds them, converting wide row models to narrow row. If he needs parts that aren't available, he builds his own. "While I have a good inventory on hand of pickers and used parts, I'm always looking for good pickers to buy," he says.

When Zimmerman first got started, he had to figure out how to convert a wide row model to narrow. "It's quite an involved process. Halfway through my first one I wasn't sure if I'd ever get it finished, but it turned out good," he says.

Finding replacement parts for corn pickers is getting to be a problem, he says. "A lot of parts aren't available through New Idea any more, which is why I started manufacturing hard-to-find parts."

One of the most popular parts that he builds are rubber paddle wheels, which replace the original rubber finger wheels on the picker's husking unit. "The original rubber finger wheels get brittle and break off, and they're very expensive to replace. My replacement paddle wheels sell for only about one fourth as much as the finger wheels."

Most narrow-row models sell for $3,000 to $4,000. "I recently had the privilege of providing a picker for an orphanage in Uganda, Africa," notes Zimmerman.

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He Makes His Own "Tire Slime"

Elwood Tainter is semi-retired and living on a fixed income. He's always looking for ways to save a few bucks and he found a good one when he figured out how to make his own tire slime.

"I fix a lot of tires for my part time lawn mower repair business," Tainter says, "and I used to go through a lot of commercial tire slime that cost more than $20 a gallon. One day I figured there had to be a way to make my own slime for a lot less money."

Tainter mixed up his own tire sealer using corn starch and water. He heated water on the stove and added starch until the mixture was the consistency of oatmeal. When the mixture turned thicker, he added a small amount of ground black pepper.

"The pepper serves to plug a tiny air leak in a tube or a tire," Tainter says. "If you don't put that in, it's probably not going to work."

Tainter stores the mixture in a jug and pumps it into a tube or a tire with a hand held pump. The mixture also works as a sealant around the edges of tires.

On most tires that he fixes Tainter removes the valve stem, cleans out the tire and then roughs up the inside surface. He puts the slime over the roughed up surface, then installs the tube or fills a tubeless tire with air. "It works well just about every time," Tainter says.

He's also used his home-brewed mixture on 28 in. tall tractor tires that are cracked, well worn and don't hold air very well. "I put enough in the tire so it will flow around the tire as I'm rolling it," Tainter says. "Then I bounce the tire on the ground so the cracks open slightly and the slime finds its way in. Instead of fluid I can add water here in California, where it doesn't freeze, and the tires don't leak. It's a very good product."

Tainter says his homemade slime also works on tubes that have small holes. "This stuff has saved me a lot of money. I can make a gallon for less than a buck, and the commercial stuff would cost me more than $20 a gallon. It's not 100 percent perfect, but it's darn good."

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Simple Solar Unit

Robert Jacobi's solar collector only adds a few degrees heat to his house, but it also only cost him a few dollars. The simple, black stovepipe helps heat his 20 by 28-ft. kitchen and living room area. As the sun heats the black pipe and the air inside it, a small 6-in. diameter fan pushes the air into the room.

"When the outside temperature is above 20 degrees, the collector adds 4 to 6 degrees to the temperature of the room," says Jacobi. "Even when the temperature gets down around zero, it raises it 2 degrees."

The collector consists of two 2-ft. lengths of stovepipe with elbows to connect them in a U-shape on edge. The connected pipes mount in a wood frame to hold them in place. One elbow at the exhaust end directs heat into the room. The fan is mounted in the end of the lower pipe and pushes air through to the other end.