

Fennema Farms commissioned this custom-made replica of a Birdsall Water Wagon to team up with their 1885 Birdsall steam engine.



## Custom-Built Replica Water Wagon

After acquiring and finishing restorations on a Birdsall horizontal slide-valve steam engine, Larry, Nick, and Ryan Fennema figured their prized tractor would look great pulling a Birdsall water wagon. They scoured the country for an original, but even though thousands were built from the late 1800s to the early 1900s, they didn't find one. They did, however, have an 1886 Birdsall catalog with a wagon picture. They supplied the photo to J.W. Schut Custom Hitch Wagons of Hopkins, Mich., which used it to scale plans and build a likeness. Schut delivered the custom-built replica in December 2023.

Ryan says their wagon chassis is from a vintage Studebaker army ambulance running gear. It's different from an original Birdsall, with springs that provide cushioning on rough terrain. Tulip poplar, hickory, and ash hardwood form the wagon's box and floor. Schut's crew finished the 11-ft. long and 67-in. tall wagon with glossy black paint and a varnish topcoat. Bright sun shows off hand-painted thin-line gold detailing and a

replica of the Birdsall manufacturer's logo. Ryan says their 5-ft. wide wagon is built to hold a payload of 240 gals. in 30 or 50-gal. barrels. They usually haul just 20 gals. and an extra 6 gals. in a stainless-steel tank under the rear cover. They plan to mount flue brushes under the wagon, add a small toolbox, and plumb the wagon to their Birdsall steam engine.

"We researched Birdsall history and found that horse-drawn water wagons were usually filled from a creek or pond where the steam engine was operating," Ryan says. "They could also carry coal and wood to fire the engine. Steam engines are very thirsty when working hard, so a water wagon was very important to the crew. We keep 40 gals. on our engine at all times."

The Fennema's found that Birdsall built thousands of wagons for various uses. A one-horse model in the 1890s was priced at \$61, and narrow-tired farm wagons ranged from \$75 to \$126. A mountain version ranged from \$88 to \$141. Lumber for building the wagons was dried in sheds for 3 to 5 years. Finished

wagons were hand-painted and topped with varnish for weather protection.

After the market crash of 1929, Birdsall sold its wagon business to the Kentucky Wagon Company in Louisville. Other business units were also sold, and the company was eventually dissolved. "We're glad the Birdsall name lives on among collectors and many others who value the name and the quality equipment the company produced," Ryan says.

Their wagon perfectly matches their 1885 Birdsall 12-hp. steam engine. They belt the engine to their 1866 Brayley Pitts hand-feed threshing machine at shows to demonstrate old-time harvesting. They've also powered a sawmill edger and Deering corn husker with the engine. He adds, "This year, we'll plumb the wagon to the engine and have a very authentic setup."

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Fennema Farms, Dorr, Mich. (Ryan@fennemafarms.com; Facebook: Fennema Farms).



## Upgraded Coffee Berry Harvester Eyes Brazil Market

Oxbo is known for its large selection of European-based self-propelled slurry and manure machines as well as vegetable and blueberry harvesters. Its newest offering is the 9240+, a self-propelled coffee berry harvester.

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Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Oxbo, Electronweg 5, Roosendaal, Netherlands, 4706 PP. NL (ph +31 (0)165 319 333; info@oxbo.com; www.oxbo.com).



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