

Cross Country Tractor Trip Raises FFA Funds



Koehn pulled a camper behind his restored Farmall M on a 2,000-mile trek from the Canadian border to south Texas.

Retired Upsala, Minn., county assessor Mark Koehn drove a 70-year-old Farmall M from the Canada-Minnesota border to South Texas in late September 2024. The trip raised more than \$6,000 for his local and state FFA.

Koehn says, "I got the idea several years ago when I read about a guy who drove a Deere tractor from Oklahoma to North Carolina for an Army reunion. Then I bought a tired old Farmall M at my parent's auction and decided that someday I'd fix it up and make a long-distance trip with it." The idea didn't reach fruition until nearly eight years later when Koehn retired.

To get the tractor ready, Koehn replaced the narrow front end with a wide front and added a large metal box to hold a generator. He added a step on the side of the tractor frame to make filling the gas tank easier. The OEM seat was uncomfortable, so he replaced it

with a more comfortable suspension version for a smoother ride. He added fenders and extended the exhaust above a large canopy he built for protection from the weather.

Other improvements included rearview mirrors, safety flashers, a cup and cellphone holder, a gas can box and a larger floor platform. New tires, paint and decals had the tractor spiffed up for the trip.

Koehn pulled a camper behind the tractor so he could rest and sleep during the nearly 2,000-mile, three-week trip. On the back of the camper, he mounted a slow-moving vehicle sign, a flashing yellow safety light, turn signals and a large sign identifying the trip as an FFA fundraiser.

Koehn participated in FFA during high school and says it helped him with public speaking and helped him mature as a young man. He and other local graduates organized

an FFA alumni group in Upsala, and Koehn thought this trip would be a good way to raise money and awareness for a worthy cause.

His route was due south from Lancaster on the Canada-Minnesota border to High Island, Texas, on the Gulf of Mexico. Before starting the trip, he took a 50-mile test drive out and back from his home and learned he could easily travel 120 miles on one tank of gas. He aimed to drive eight hours and travel 100 miles daily.

He left Lancaster the first day after news media interviews and drove until heavy rain forced him to park at a farm site. It rained nearly 3 1/2 inches that night, but he wasn't discouraged. The following day, he was flagged down by a lady in a mobility scooter alongside the road. She'd heard about his trip and wanted to offer him encouragement, prayers and molasses cookies. She also gave him a \$10 bill and said her daughter would call her daily and let her know how his trip was going.

Koehn says that was the beginning of great connections along his 2,000-mile route. In northern Iowa, he had problems with the tractor's starter. The Case dealer in Storm Lake, Iowa, replaced it without charging for labor. Ed's DX station in Webb, Iowa, filled his tank with a fuel donation. In Kansas, he stopped at a campground where a family offered him a hot evening meal. Further down the road, he stopped to wash his clothes at a laundromat and encountered two ladies who told him he should probably add laundry detergent before he started the washer. They

asked if he knew how to fold clothes, and he said he usually stuffs things in a drawer, which they thought was crazy.

He was interviewed by newspapers, radio and TV stations at multiple stops along the trip. He also encountered many people who shared their experiences in FFA and how important the organization was to them.

Nearing the trail's end in Texas, he stopped to have Owen's Welding in Kirbyville reweld the brackets holding the generator box on the front of the tractor. He also worked on the transmission for four hours in the hot Texas sun.

Koehn says driving from Galveston to Port Arthur across the Intercoastal Canal was a nerve-racking experience. There was a 30 mph wind on the steep bridge, but he made it safely. At the end of the trip, he'd planned on selling the camper, but instead, he rented a pickup and pulled it back to Minnesota. However, he sold the tractor to two men who will keep it in a Winnie, Texas, museum. His trip raised over \$6,000, with 50 percent donated to the Upsala FFA and the remainder to the Minnesota FFA Alumni Association and the National FFA Alumni.

Throughout the trip, Koehn says he had to concentrate very hard on driving, so he couldn't really take in the scenery. He needed both hands on the wheel and found it difficult to use his phone. Still, he says he'd make the trip again if he were younger.

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Wool Overalls Made To Last

Laura Fisher, founder of the slow-fashion brand RevivALL Clothing, aims to change people's attitudes toward apparel. The brand promotes the "revival" of a simpler way of life through responsibly sourced, folk-inspired clothing.

RevivALL has been in the works for a while. "I've been sewing my whole life; the business has had multiple different iterations over the years," says Fisher. "I started repurposing men's shirts, but things really took off in 2008 when I had a near-death experience on Good Friday. The full business idea came to me on Easter."

As Fisher refined the brand over the years, sustainability became a greater focus when she switched to exclusively using deadstock fabric in 2015. "Deadstock" refers to rejected fabric, typically because the company that ordered it no longer needs the design. It's often destined for the landfill unless eco-conscious companies divert it into new products. RevivALL alone keeps hundreds of bolts out of the trash each year.

Every RevivALL piece is handmade—a big deal, as wool is rarely available as deadstock. "I'm one of maybe two companies making wool overalls," says Fisher. "They're amazing in winter for comfort and functionality." Even better, maintenance is minimal. "I rarely wash mine, honestly," she shares. "Wool is anti-microbial and doesn't hold onto scents. They don't need much care; you really only need to wash them once a year."

Managing a homemade clothing company comes with challenges. "It's a constant struggle to shift the consumer mindset about clothing," Fisher says. "Clothing is so devalued in our culture, and I can't compete with the pricing of big box stores. Farmers seem to understand where I'm coming from. It's the farm-to-table mentality. I firmly believe the shift towards knowing where your food comes from needs to happen for clothes, too." Her goal remains to change the value proposition around clothing. "We don't need as much clothing as we think we do. Invest in quality pieces that you can wear weekly, even

The overalls (\$175 to \$315) weigh about 3 lbs. each and come in sizes small to 3XL.

hundreds of times, and you can change your relationship with clothing while supporting small, American-made companies."

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"Being involved in the antique quilt world for so long has helped build my reputation and business," says Balsamo.

Dana Balsamo, founder of Dana Auctions LLC, manages monthly auctions specializing in vintage and antique textiles. These auctions are available online and in person in Princeton, N.J.

Balsamo has decades of experience with antique textiles, having worked as a dealer, appraiser and historian. She has been an antique textile dealer for over 20 years and is an American Quilt Society Certified Quilt Appraiser and a Quilt Historian.

"Dana Auctions began in my home in Princeton, N.J.," she says. "I'd gotten my Pennsylvania auctioneer's license in 2019 and had worked at several auction houses. But when auctions stopped during the pandemic, I needed to stay busy. I had a large inventory, so I sold my personal collection over the first few auctions. Word spread, and

consignments started coming in."

By July 2021, Balsamo had moved the business to a small office. "I hired staff, and we operated simulcast auctions in-person and online. But we outgrew that space quickly," she says. Now, Dana Auctions operates out of a 4,000 sq. ft. warehouse. "We run monthly auctions, sometimes twice a month. The auctions are simulcast or online only, depending on the assets."

Balsamo and her team take great pride in their catalogs. "The textiles have to be accurately described, including the era or date, fabric content (cotton, linen), size, construction technique (hand, machine, embroidered, quilted, etc.), and condition. And photographs are critical."

Everything auctioned is guaranteed antique or vintage; most items are gently used.

Bidders (both online and in-person) must register in advance, a process that only requires a driver's license. The LLC charges an 18% Buyer's Premium on top of the winning bid. In-house shipping is available.

Dana Auctions is popular with buyers and sellers, and Balsamo often takes consignments six months in advance. "We were featured in Quilt Folk Magazine last year, and I assisted the Antiques Roadshow on the Textile Table last year in Urbandale, Iowa," she says. "Being involved in the antique quilt world for so long has helped build my reputation and business."

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