



Bob Dickey, foreground, and Jack Littlejohn, background, co-founders of DICKEY-john demonstrate an early planter monitor in 1966.

DICKEY-john CO. GREW FROM NOTHING INTO A \$50 MILLION BUSINESS IN 25 YEARS

Inventor's Success Story Started On His Farm

By C.F. Marley

The rise of DICKEY-john Company over the past 25 years from an on-farm start-up business into a \$50 million corporation is nothing short of an "Alice In Wonderland" story, and one with special interest for me since I photographed and gave national publicity to Bob Dickey's first planter monitor.

It's hard to believe that this world leader in electronic monitoring equipment got its start from a lawn mower accident and a hospital visit by a preacher. But, that's how it happened.

In the mid-60's, Bob Dickey, a young farmer near Chatham, Ill., was mowing his lawn when a piece of wire hit him in the eye. It was a serious accident. During his stay at the hospital he was paid a visit by his preacher, a man who was well-acquainted with farming. So it was not strange that the conversation drifted to farming.

"During the visit he told me that something badly needed in farming was a monitor to keep tabs on flow of grain from planter boxes to the ground," Dickey recalls. "I got me thinking and I went on to produce the first homemade monitor as a result."

It was the beginning of a lot of struggle and growing pains over the years, too, as he started building and selling the monitors, bringing in outside help to turn the fledgling enterprise into a growing concern. There were some ups and downs, but the timing was right and the company boomed during the 70's and 80's.

One of the most common questions Bob Dickey has been asked over the years concerns the unusual name of the company.

What happened was this: Dickey's "side-kick" at the time was his brother-in-law, Jack Littlejohn. So, while coming up with a name for the company, they decided to make it a hybrid and spell it with "DICKEY" in capital letters and "john" in lower case letters. The name has always had an eye-catching appeal that the company thought had value.

DICKEY-john vice president Ellen Hearn says the company, which originally operated out of Bob Dickey's farmhouse kitchen, now employs nearly 400 people in its manufacturing plant and corporate headquarters on the south side of Auburn, Ill., where, appropriately, it is surrounded by corn and soybean fields.

Sales first approached \$50 million in 1990 and distribution extends to Japan and Europe, in addition to the United States, Canada and Latin America.

While the original DICKEY-john concept was a planter monitor, widespread acceptance of that monitor has paved the way for an entirely new technology called "Agrionics" that involves all types of agricultural electronics equipment.

Today, DICKEY-john is a major supplier of agrionics to agricultural equipment manufacturers. In fact, DICKEY-john instrumentation is found on many of the tractors, combines, cotton harvesters and seed planters sold around the world. The company also makes products for construction, food, and public works industries.

(C.F. Marley is a veteran freelance farm reporter based in Nokomis, Ill.)

HELPS FAMILY SPOT DEER WHEN THEY COME TO FEED

Deer Ring Doorbell At This Farm Home

"We love to watch deer feed at the feeder in our front yard, but we didn't always get to see them until I rigged up my front doorbell so they could ring it and let us know when they're there. Now they sometimes ring the bell 2 or 3 times a night," says Louis Mezak, Novelty, Ohio.

Without a warning system, Mezak and his family had to get lucky to spot the deer when they visited his feeder. Often they come at night when the family is in bed. Now the Mezaks get up and look out their bedroom window when deer show up. "We love to look at them so we don't mind getting up. We can always disconnect the doorbell at night if we have visitors or don't want to have our sleep interrupted," says Mezak.

To rig up the deer doorbell, he ran a wire

from his front doorbell to the feeder which is just a few feet in front of the house. He put a conventional doorbell under a small 2 by 6-in. wooden box that's mounted on four small springs. He puts cut-up apple slices in the box. When the animals reach in to pull the slices out, they push on the box, depressing the doorbell button and setting off the chimes in the house.

Mezak says the deer in the area are so used to coming up to his house that he probably could have put the doorbell alert system right up on his front porch but he worried that the chimes would scare the animals, causing them to hurt themselves if they rushed off the porch.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Louis Mezak, 15099 Sperry Road, Novelty, Ohio 44072 (ph 216 338-5874).



The 9,000 hp tractor pulls a 50,000 to 80,000-lb. sled along a 300-ft. track, using up to 20 gal. of fuel in less than 20 seconds.

POWERED BY 6 SUPERCHARGED 1,500 HP ENGINES

"Sassy Massey" Pulling Tractor

A 9,000 hp tractor loaded to the gills with six 1,500 hp supercharged engines is winning major tractor pulling contests across the U.S. and Canada.

The "Sassy Massey", sponsored in part by the Industrial division of Massey Ferguson, Kendall Oil Co., and New England Dodge dealers, competes in 20 National Tractor Pulling Association contests each year. The tractor pulls a 50,000 to 80,000-lb. sled, depending on track conditions, along a 300-ft. track. Runs vary from 10 to 20 seconds at full throttle, using up 15 to 20 gal. of fuel. So much fuel is used that the tractor has to be refueled after every run. After the competition pulling season has ended, it keeps busy making promotional appearances throughout U.S. and Canada.

John Knox is owner and manager of the tractor. "The engines are aftermarket aluminum replicas of Dodge 426 Hemi engines, but are supercharged and burn straight methanol. Each engine has more than three times as much power as a conventional pickup. All that horsepower is really hard on the 5-ft. tall, \$4,000 rear tires. They're

pretty well used up after one season."

John's wife Rodalyn drives the Sassy Massey and is the only nationally competitive woman driver in the U.S. "She competes in 20 pulls each year. Last year she ended her rookie season in third place nationally. She won the Indy Superpull and five grand national events and seven second places."

John's 26-year-old son Brian is the mechanic.

John migrated from drag racing cars to tractor pulling. He started repowering tractors in 1979 when he rebuilt an old Massey Harris 55 to compete in professional tractor pulls. At the time he was a Massey Ferguson dealer. "Over the years we kept upgrading the tractor and adding engines and called it the Sassy Massey. As we kept upgrading and building more tractors we went to more specialized hybrid parts. Now the Sassy Massey doesn't have any major Massey Ferguson parts at all."

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