

# Lovas Farms

NEWSLETTER | APRIL 2011

## IS SPRING HERE YET?

As I write this newsletter, we are experiencing a fierce March storm that is bringing rain, freezing rain, and snow. March and April storms always make me nervous. The combination of stormy and warmer weather generally brings higher precipitation totals, but the ability for the thermometer to drop below freezing usually means slushy, hard-to-remove snow, icy roads, and power outages. Hopefully we all get through this unscathed!



I think I may have gotten a little carried away with my power outage preparation. Pictured is my Dodge pickup with three generators, four gas cans, and a large assortment of extension cords!

## EXCITING CHANGES OVER THE WINTER

A couple of exciting changes happened this winter. My sister, Jeannine, and her husband, Todd, welcomed their first child, Kate Loraine, on January 16, 2011. Many prayers were answered by Kate's safe and healthy arrival, and she has captured the entire family's attention and focus.

Another change was Sarah's decision to pursue a new career path. As of January, Sarah left her employment with Halstad Elevator Company to go back to North Dakota State University to pursue a master of science degree in soil science. Sarah loved her job with Halstad Elevator Company. The working relationships she built with area farmers, serving as a source of information, were something she enjoyed so much. It was a difficult decision for her.

Now, more than two months into her schooling, she's confident she made the right decision to go back to college. Sarah is intensely passionate about her studies and strives to learn all that she can. I put one stipulation for the career move from full-time agronomist to student, that she continues to scout all our crops and manage our seed selections. Since she took over that aspect of the farm some time ago, I have since focused my attention on other details and I don't have any desire to play catch-up and reeducate myself on the rapid changes in specific hybrid traits. I jokingly tell Sarah, "You pick the seed, and I'll make sure the planter is working properly and in the field at the right time!"

## WINTER PROJECTS

This winter saw the addition of a new pull-type sprayer with tracks and a 2,400-gallon spray tank. With its large-capacity spray tank, we deemed it necessary to switch the plumbing on our water truck from two-inch to three-inch. It is quite a jump between the two sizes, both in weight and cost, but we feel the speed with which we will be able to fill the sprayer will pay off during the life of the sprayer. We're looking forward to using a track running gear to help minimize wheel tracks, compaction, and ruts should it become necessary to spray in less-than-ideal field conditions.

We also added a new combine to the lineup for this fall. We traded our IH 2388, which served us well for many years, for a new 7120. The 7120 is basically the same machine as our existing 7010 combine; the new number just signifies a newer model. It will be nice having two combines with the same width heads for harvesting wheat and soybeans. Plus, the headers and almost all the parts will be interchangeable between the two machines.

We recently completed switching our planter tractor duties from the 8400T to a 765B Caterpillar. This should be a simple process, right? Just hook the other tractor up to the planter. Unfortunately it's not quite that simple. We apply five gallons per acre of starter fertilizer when we plant corn. To keep the number of fills per day to a minimum, we use saddle tanks on the tractor along with a tank on the planter to carry the liquid fertilizer. Due to the larger frame of the 765B Cat, we can carry more fertilizer, so we added two 500-gallon tanks to the tractor. This, plus the 500 gallons on the planter frame, allows us to do roughly 240 acres between fills. This is an increase from the 8400T that only had two 200-gallon tanks. The tanks we used for the Cat were for a slightly different application, which meant we had to modify them to fit ours. We also added a hydraulic pump that's mounted to the tractor frame to give us the ability to agitate the solution in the tractor tanks. This feature will be useful for some experimental soybean treatment that Sarah would like to use during soybean seeding.



A new pull-type sprayer with tracks will minimize wheel tracks and compaction.



Plumbing was upgraded on the water truck from two to three inches to make filling the sprayer quicker.



Larger, 500-gallon tank on the Cat allows us to carry more fertilizer.

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## MORE DRAIN TILING...

Last fall after harvest, we had Ellingson Drainage design and install drain tile systems on the field behind the shop and the south quarter. These systems were a bit more complicated in that these were the first projects in which pumping sites had to be installed.

Pumping sites look similar to a well with a large vertical pipe installed at the edge of the field the drain tile flows into. A pump is installed in this vertical pipe and pumps the water up and out to a surface drain ditch.

This pumping site adds a considerable cost to the project due to the cost of the pump, burying electrical service to the pump site, and the cost of the electricity to run the pumps. This differs from our past drainage systems in which topography allowed us to gravity drain the tile into rivers or legal drains. As the snow is starting to thaw and show the fields again, I'm excited to farm these two fields and see the benefits of drain tile and how these fields will respond. I can't wait!

## WHAT'S HAPPENING IN THE SHOP?

This winter, the shop has seen its usual array of projects. So far, the 8400T has been through the shop at Opegard's with only minor repairs being necessary this year. Last year we discussed some concerns about the fuel injection pump possibly needing attention after another season, but great results this winter indicated that everything was still within specifications. At 6,000 engine hours the tractor isn't new, but it still has a lot of useful life left in it.

Butler Machinery spent a number of days in our shop this winter giving our four Caterpillar tractors their usual preventive maintenance. We have been well pleased with the performance of all of our Cat tractors, and the service we receive from Butler is second to none. Butler Machinery has a long history of maintaining construction machinery, in which down time is even more expensive than it is in agriculture. This experience has helped them to be a leader in agricultural tractor service.

Every spring Butler opens up their shop for an annual customer appreciation breakfast, and it never ceases to amaze me the cleanliness of their shop. I often joke with their mechanics that their shop is cleaner than my house!



The tractors are all tuned up and waiting for spring!



The planter is ready to hit the dirt!

We have yet to have Titan Machinery up to look at the 7010 combine or the MX220 tractor. There are no known issues with either machine and I know Titan will attend to our needs before we hit the fields.

Currently, we have the planter in the shop giving it the usual spring tune-up. Nothing too major has shown up so far, but it takes time to check over all the moving parts. After planting season last year, we removed all the units and had them put on the test stand to assure peak performance. This test allows us to see any problems with individual seeding units. Problems could include faulty door seals or seed ejectors, worn out slides, vacuum leaks, etc. We usually plant at about 5.6 miles per hour and at that speed, each unit can accurately plant, properly singulate, and cover corn seeds at a rate of 14 kernels per second! Planting is commonly thought of as the most important field operation in determining yield, so equipment performance is especially important.

## WINTER FUN!

For some getaway time this winter, I was fortunate enough to go on two snowmobile trips out to Idaho. Snow and weather conditions were very favorable, and our whole group had a great time on our trips. Being out in the mountains is great because of the beautiful scenery, and it's even better when you can enjoy it while enjoying another hobby like snowmobiling. The snowmobiles of today have incredible abilities to take you places during the winter that weren't possible even a few years ago.

I sometimes imagine parallels of mountain snowmobiling to farming years ago with horses. Although farming was much more labor intensive, mountain snowmobiling often means digging your sled out of tricky situations, on a steep mountain, in deep

snow, at high altitudes, pausing with the group to enjoy your packed lunch when the surroundings are quiet and picturesque, all the while relying on your machine to get you back before nightfall. It reminds me of what it would have been like when it was necessary to stop the horses at noon to rest both you and the horses and take pride in the work that was accomplished thus far.



Mountain snowmobiling often comes with digging your sled out of the snow.

## LOOKING FORWARD TO SUMMER!

Winter has been with us for long enough and it's time to get back out in the fields! Each new season is exciting and, as always, I'm looking forward to the next one. It's good to park the snow removal equipment and put away the countless layers of clothing needed to protect me from the winter cold and start enjoying the feeling of the sun shining down on my face.

We are also excited to do some custom planting and harvesting this year for a neighbor. This endeavor will require us to do quite a bit of wheat seeding, something we haven't practiced for several years. As a result, last fall we brought the air seeder into the shop and switched it back to the original 7.5" spacing, which differs from the 22" spacing we were using for soybean seeding. We are looking forward to this being a positive experience for both parties. It's always exciting to enter into new ventures.

