

**Editor's
Notebook**



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FARM SHOW's "Worst Buy"

In case you've been wondering, our 1995 Ford Windstar is running great.

Last year, in Vol. 25, No. 4, we reported that the van had just been fitted with its fifth engine at just 65,000 miles. All four replacement engines were installed between 55,000 and 65,000 miles.



FARM SHOW's 1995 Ford Windstar is on its fifth engine.

The 1995 Windstar has a notoriously bad engine. That's the bad news. The good news is that Ford extended the warranty indefinitely on these vehicles since nearly 100 percent of them experience head gasket failure.

In FARM SHOW's case, the situation was about as bad as it gets. After the head gasket was replaced on the original engine, the engine blew up. The next three replacement engines also failed. The dealer blamed Ford's engine rebuilding facility in Wisconsin.

I'm happy to report that the fifth engine did the trick (knock on wood). The van has been running like new for the past 12,000 miles with no problems at all. In fact, the only problems we've ever had with this van have been with the engine, and all the costs involved were paid for by Ford. If this van ever wears out, I'd certainly consider Ford again. The company - and their dealer - handled our problem the way every company should.

Earthworm Farming

Twelve years ago, Illinois farmer and entrepreneur Bill Kreitzer engineered a method to "plant" earthworms in fields at the same time crops are planted, using "melt away" gelatin capsules containing earthworm eggs (Vol. 14, No. 2).

He formed a company to develop the idea and still believes in it as strongly as he ever did but, so far, the idea has yet to gain widespread acceptance.

Kreitzer's company, Advanced Biotechnology Inc. (ABI) markets earthworm egg capsules under the brand name ET Seeds. ET stands for Earthworm Tillage. The University of Illinois has set up earthworm research plots on Kreitzer's farm.

Earthworms reproduce by laying a cocoon with eggs inside it. Under ideal laboratory conditions, earthworm eggs hatch in 3 to 6 weeks. However, the eggs hatch only when soil temperature is right. At 3 months of age, the earthworms are old enough to produce their own cocoons. Kreitzer's goal has always been to develop an automated process for encapsulating earthworm eggs in gelatin capsules. The idea is to coat the cocoon with a substance that preserves the eggs to keep them viable until they're planted. Last summer, working with Ball Horticultural Company in West Chicago, Ill., they successfully encapsulated mass quantities of Kreitzer's earthworm cocoons and were able to keep the eggs viable for over a year.

The final phase of research is aimed at determining the optimal storage conditions for the encapsulated cocoons under different temperature and moisture conditions. Kreitzer is looking for additional investors and would be willing to sell up to 50 percent of his patent for the process in order to attract enough funds to finish the research. He wants to build production facilities and design equipment for automation of the harvesting and encapsulation. Interested parties can contact him at ABI, 104 W. Market, Box 1, Elliott, Ill. 60933 (ph 217 784-4367).

Reflecting On The State Of Agriculture

As part of a Navy reunion, I recently visited the plantation home of president Andrew Jackson, near Nashville, Tenn. It's called the Hermitage.

At the time of his death in 1845, Jackson owned and operated 1,000 acres. His chief cash crop was cotton and he owned 140 slaves to get the job done. To feed everyone, he butchered 200 hogs a year. He also had beef cattle, milk cows, and sheep. The Jackson farm was almost totally self sufficient thanks to the enterprise of the slave residents.

Now the contrast: Recently I read of a farmer who farms 1,000 acres by himself. Unfortunately, that is not enough to provide his living so he is also employed full-time in town.

Today a farmer with 1,000 acres is not only underemployed, he has to depend on the government for more than half of his net income. What would Andrew Jackson and the other residents of the Hermitage think about that? *C.F. Marley, Nokomis, Ill.*

In the United States, lawns occupy more land than any single crop, including wheat, corn or tobacco. Homeowners use 10 times more chemical pesticides per acre than farmers do. As much as 60 percent of water in Western cities is used for lawns; as much as 30 percent in Eastern cities. Of the 34 major pesticides commonly used on lawns, 32 have not been tested for their long-term effects on humans and the environment. *(Newsweek)*

Farmland Prices

Many people outside agriculture seem to have the idea that buying farmland is a great way to get rich. This recent piece from Forbes magazine tells a different story:

"Average farmland values have risen 1.1 percent a year (above inflation) since the Depression. This compares to 2.7 percent for the Dow Jones average. After peaking in 1981, land prices had dropped 35 percent by 1987 and have since just barely recovered. In today's purchasing power, an acre of farmland is worth two-thirds of what it was at its peak.

"The downside of investing in farmland is that today's valuation is totally dependent upon a continuation of government subsidies. If those subsidies end, land prices will fall."



Massey tractor fitted with front and rear plows worked non-stop for 24 hrs. to set the new record.

World Plowing Record

A new world plowing record of 620 acres in 24 hrs. was set recently by a Massey 8280 tractor equipped with two Gregoire Besson plows. It had a 4-bottom plow on front and a 13-bottom rollover plow on back. The event was sponsored by Michelin tire and other farm suppliers. It took place at the end of March on a large farm in rural France.

To beat the previous record of 516 acres, the tractor was driven in a circular pattern so it never had to stop.

Bye Bye Barcodes

By the year 2010, you will no longer have to stop at the check-out in grocery stores to have your groceries scanned. All you'll do is wheel your cart past a scanner, which will look like an airport metal detector. Your total tab will be instantly calculated and displayed on a screen. If everything looks okay, you print out a receipt and head for the door.

What makes this scenario possible are dirt-cheap printed circuits that will replace bar codes on commercial products. The passive "transponder" circuits will draw enough power from the magnetic field generated by the reader to send back an ID number that's fed into a computer. It will be similar to security tags that are already attached to clothing and other high-value merchandise at some stores today.

Researchers at the University of California Berkeley are working on machinery that will print the circuits. A group representing big name-brand stores is working with the engineers to standardize the procedure so it can be adopted quickly once it is perfected. *(Wired)*

Words Of Wisdom

"The time is now near at hand which must probably determine whether Americans are to be freemen or slaves; whether they are to have any property they can call their own; whether their houses and farms are to be pillaged and destroyed, and themselves consigned to a state of wretchedness from which no human efforts will deliver them. The fate of unborn millions will now depend on God, on the courage and conduct of this army. Our cruel unrelenting enemy leaves us only the choice of brave resistance or the most abject submission. We have, therefore, resolved to conquer or die."

George Washington

"Never give in. Never, never, never, never, in nothing great or small, large or petty, never give in except to convictions of honor and good sense. Never yield to force; never yield to the apparently overwhelming might of the enemy."

Winston Churchill.

"The price of freedom is eternal vigilance."

Thomas Jefferson

"Only a virtuous people are capable of freedom. As nations become corrupt and vicious, they have more need of masters." *Benjamin Franklin*

"We stand today at a crossroads: One path leads to despair and utter hopelessness. The other leads to total extinction. Let us hope we have the wisdom to make the right choice."

Woody Allen

Peanut Butter Slices

In a classic story of product marketing, researchers at the University of Oklahoma recently brought a new product to market - peanut butter slices.

The idea is to make peanut butter as convenient to use as single slice cheese. A process using minimal added ingredients was developed at the school's Food & Agricultural Products Center and then licensed to a startup manufacturer - Kennedy Foods in Edmond, Okla. The company is already marketing the product in some areas of the country under the brand name "PB Slices".

Taxiing down a runway, the jetliner abruptly stopped, turned around, and returned to the gate. After an hour-long wait it finally took off. A concerned passenger asked a flight attendant, "What was the problem?"

"The pilot was bothered by a noise he heard in the engine," the flight attendant explained, "and it took us a while to find another pilot."

While on a car trip, an elderly couple stopped at a roadside restaurant for lunch. The woman unfortunately left her glasses on the table but didn't miss them until they were back on the highway. They had to travel quite a distance before they could find a place to turn around.

The old man fussed and complained all the way back to the restaurant, lecturing his wife on the need to be more responsible about her belongings.

When they finally arrived, as the old woman got out of the car to retrieve her glasses, the man said, "While you're in there, you may as well get my hat, too."