



Marvin May converted a Mertz self-propelled floatation sprayer into this "Fire Buggy". Fire nozzles on each side are controlled by linear actuators.

## Fire Buggy Provides On-Farm Fire Protection

Marvin May built his Fire Buggy after his parents lost several farm buildings, a windbreak, and fencing in a 2012 fire. Immediately after leaving the devastating scene, May came up with his plan.

"I looked on the Internet and found a Mertz floater spray rig for sale north of Lincoln, Nebraska," he explains. "I took all the pipe off and put on two high pressure pumps and plastic fittings. I spent all winter rebuilding it."

He positioned fire nozzles on each side and controls them with linear actuators. After spending a lot of time trying to set up a nozzle on the front, he learned about the Akron Brass Company Fire Monitor, an apparatus that can spray water 190 degrees in a fog or more than 100 ft. on a jet setting.

The Mertz floater carries three tanks including a large 1,600-gal. tank and two 50-gal. tanks. With throttle controls, May can adjust the pump pressure, and on its highest setting can empty the 1,600-gal. tank in 20 minutes.

"I put in 2 and 3-in. fill pipes on both sides so anyone can fill it with water," May notes.

On his farm he keeps 15,000 gal. of water on hand in various chemical plastic totes and tanks. Since building the Fire Buggy for less than \$15,000, he hasn't had to use it to fight a fire. But he has found a couple of uses for it.

"During wheat harvest we've had various



Sprayer carries 3 tanks including a large 1,600-gal. tank and two 50-gal. tanks.

fires in the past started by bearings and chains. So instead of having it sitting in the shed, we park the Fire Buggy on the edge of the field in case there's a problem," May says.

To make sure everything is working, May occasionally waters the outside rows of corn during dry periods. "We need fire protection. The fire department is 10 miles away so we can be addressing a fire before the fire department gets here," he says.

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Safety hitch pin bracket comes with a small hole on top to insert a snap ring, and a 1 1/2-in. dia. hole at bottom for the pin.

## Locking Hitch Pin Bracket

You'll never lose a wagon again due to a lost hitch pin, says Clarence Genz, Forest Lake, Minn., distributor of a new safety hitch pin bracket.

Invented by Minnesota farmer Ken Harwick, the U-shaped bracket measures 5 1/2 in. high by 2 1/2 in. deep. It comes with a small hole on top to insert a snap ring and a 1 1/2-in. dia. hole at the bottom for the pin. You slip the pin through the drawbar and implement tongue, keeping the pin up high enough so you can slide the top of the bracket through the pin handle. Then insert the pin through the bracket's large hole, push

the handle down, and insert the snap ring.

"The snap ring keeps the pin from ever popping loose in the field. It locks the pin in place securely no matter how rough the terrain," says Genz. "If you want to leave the machine in the field, you can substitute a padlock for the snap ring."

The hitch pin bracket is painted black and can be custom-painted for orders of 10 or more. It sells for less than \$20 plus S&H.

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The Dutch company Solynta is within a couple years of introducing potato seed for the commercial market.

## They're Planting Potatoes With Seed

Instead of planting bags of seed potatoes, imagine sowing a packet of potato seeds in your garden that yield twice as much as normal. After several years of research, the Dutch company Solynta may be within a couple years of introducing potato seed for the commercial market. The seeds have already exceeded expectations when tested in Africa, says Hein Kruyt, CEO of the company.

He explains potatoes have seeds inside the small tomato-like berries that grow on the plants. But the seeds are useless for commercial growers because their size is not consistent.

"The core of our discovery is that we found a way to make the seeds exactly the same," Kruyt says. Solynta creates "true hybrids" that are developed by "several rounds of inbreeding, and hybrid cultivars are generated by crossing parent lines."

(It's a traditional breeding approach, he notes, so the seed is not genetically modified.)

Though researchers are close, they haven't quite met the necessary thresholds for taste, disease resistance and other traits for the commercial market.

"The threshold in Africa is significantly lower. Potatoes contribute to their well being so we shipped seeds for trials, and they did far better than we expected," Kruyt says.

He notes that initially Solynta sent second-rate seeds that were culled from research. When the seeds yielded as well as seed potatoes, the company sent better seeds that yielded more than three times as much. For the trials, the seed is started in a seedbed, then transplanted.

Kruyt notes that potatoes grown from the seeds can be saved and planted for a few



Seeds are found in the small tomato-like berries that grow on plants.

years before the yield and quality decrease. Starting with fresh seed every 3 to 5 years should maintain good yields.

"We are at the beginning of a very exciting journey with the potato. Worldwide, it's an amazing plant," Kruyt says, noting that the seed research is unlocking the potato's potential. Being able to ship seeds instead of seed potatoes reduces shipping costs, and eliminates rotting and other storage issues.

Trials will continue in Africa for another 2 or 3 seasons to test the consistency of the seed performance through drought and different weather.

Researchers will continue to work on breeding traits that handle drought, heat and salinity, for example. Within a couple of years, the goal is to have seed available for commercial use. Kruyt anticipates that organic farmers will be the first to be interested, and he welcomes inquiries from growers in North America who are interested in conducting trials.

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