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Monthly Safety Blast

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How to Choose a Tractor

Tractors come in various sizes, ages, and types. The purchase of a tractor and/or machinery is a large investment. When selecting a tractor, you need to consider the size of your operation, the tasks you need to perform, and safety. A tractor that is too small for a job can result in longer work hours, delays, and unsafe working conditions. A tractor that is too large can result in higher operating costs. The size of tractor you purchase should be based on getting high-horsepower jobs done in an efficient and safe manner.

Tractors can be 2-wheel drive, front-wheel assist (unequal 4-wheel drive) and equal 4-wheel drive. Two-wheel drive tractors, which range in size from 5-200 hp, are simpler in design, cheaper, have fewer mechanical parts and a smaller turning radius. However, they do not handle uneven terrain or wet conditions well. Front-Wheel Assist tractors are popular in the U.S. and range in size from 5-240 hp. They can deliver about 50% of the rated power at the drawbar and about 80% to a rear power take off (PTO). Equal Four-Wheel Drive tractors range in size from 35-600 hp. They are the most powerful type of tractor, but they are expensive to purchase and maintain and they are hard to maneuver.

Everyone knows the job is easier when you have the right tools. What jobs do you need to perform? Do you need to build a fence, mow pastures, or move dirt? Tractors serve four primary purposes:

1. Load Mover
2. Remote Power Source
3. Implement Carrier
4. Transport Unit (drawbar)

Be sure to talk to your equipment dealer about the tasks you need to perform, the appropriate implements and the right size tractor to carry/operate the implements. More information on tractor-task match can be found at <http://www.caes.uga.edu/departments/bae/extension/pubs/documents/farm%20tractor.pdf>.

When deciding which tractor to buy or use on your farm, think about the age of the machine. Some things do not get better with age. Although older tractors are nostalgic, they frequently lack safety features and safer design elements. For example, older tricycle tractors are much more likely to roll over than their wide front end counterparts. Older tractor may also have pan-type seats that are easier to fall out of than the new tractor seats with a back and arm rests. Many older tractors also lack a roll bar and seatbelt to protect the operator in a roll over.

Other safety features to look for on a tractor include:

- PTO shields installed and in good condition
- Operational lights and reflectors in good condition
- Safety start system
- Operational brakes and brake pedals
- Easy steering

Being careful during your tractor selection can save a lot of time and frustration in the future, not to mention your life.

References:

- <http://www.caes.uga.edu/departments/bae/extension/pubs/documents/farm%20tractor.pdf>
- <http://www.nstmop.psu.edu/tasksheets/4.1%20Agricultural%20Tractors.pdf>
- <http://www.nstmop.psu.edu/tasksheets/4.2%20Tractor%20Hazards.pdf>

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