

Homegrown



CUTTING EDGE TRACTORS GO ON THE MARKET

Post Falls farmer to sell automated tractors

By **JOHN O'CONNELL**
EO Media Group

A Post Falls, Idaho, seed potato farmer has announced he's building driverless tractors and will deliver the first machine within 60 days.

With no cab, steering wheel, seat or gauges, David Farb, founder of Farb Guidance Systems, said his innovation will require just 75 horsepower and will be roughly half the size of a modern, conventional tractor.

Farb expects to build about 60 units in 2016 and has already received commitments for 100 units. He plans to step up production in 2017. The purchase price for one of his tractors will be from \$160,000 to \$170,000. He's working with equipment dealers around the state, including a large dealership in Southern Idaho, to provide a network to maintain the machines.

A second machine will be delivered to the Southern Idaho farm shortly thereafter, with tweaks made based on performance observations.

"We think that once these get in the dirt that it will be an explosive type market," Farb said. "It's pretty hard to say no to it at the cost and what it does for you."

The tractors will have several sensors to alert



COURTESY OF FARB GUIDANCE SYSTEMS

Farb's initial platform, the FGS 1, is a 75hp Caterpillar Skid Steer driven completely by a computerized guidance system which can be monitored remotely via cell phone or computer.

farmers in the event of an equipment problem. They'll be guided by GPS maps, and Farb said they'll be capable of pulling "the smaller end" of existing implements. Farb also has driverless equipment in development, believing automated technology will soon render tractors — even those with no cabs — obsolete. Farb also expects automated planters, harvesters and other equipment will be much smaller than current equipment — and far cheaper.

Farb explained machines have evolved to be bigger, more powerful and more expensive to enable a single operator to cover more ground. With driverless equipment, his company calculates growers will

achieve the greatest return on investment with multiple, smaller machines. Smaller equipment will have added benefits for precision agriculture.

With big equipment, growers must utilize large zones for their variable-rate applications. Farb anticipates automated sprayers of the future will use single nozzles to treat individual plants.

"We believe we can get it down to the plant scale," Farb said. "That's not precision agriculture. That's surgical agriculture."

Farb's company is initially ordering components and assembling tractors in-house, but eventually hopes to work with another company on manufacturing.

Farb has tested the tractors on his farm and plans to use them in his regular farming operations this season. He believes his company is farther along than any competitor in commercializing automated farm equipment.

"Companies have prototypes out there, but we believe at this point in time we're the world leader in unmanned agricultural



JOHN O'CONNELL/CAPITAL PRESS

During the March 7 Intermountain AgTech Conference in Pocatello, David Farb of Farb Guidance Systems in Post Falls, Idaho, discusses the driverless tractors his company will soon deliver to farmers in Idaho. Farb said his business will be on the forefront of the development of automated farming equipment.



COURTESY OF FARB GUIDANCE SYSTEMS

This artist's conception shows the T8.300 tractor, designed by Farb Guidance Systems. The 75 horsepower autonomous machine is about half the size of a conventional tractor and can be monitored remotely via cell phone or computer. Farb expects to build about 60 units in 2016.

equipment," Farb said.

He's discussed partnering with Idaho State University, which offers an associate's degree in civil engineering technology, on research into prescription maps. Darren Leavitt, an instructor in ISU's College

of Technology, sees opportunities for student internships in map design.

"How are you going to send an unmanned tractor out to mitigate a problem in the field if you don't have the coordinates for that problem?" Leavitt asked.

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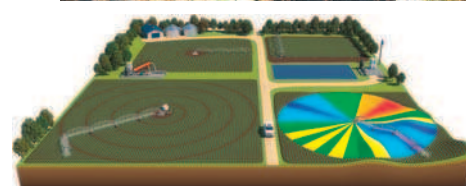
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