



Inflatable Case-IH tractor stands 30 ft. high, dwarfing this Deere 4-WD tractor.

Giant Inflatable Balloons Promote Farm Products

If you've seen the giant inflatable farm tractors and combines at big farm shows the past few years, you might have wondered where they came from. We decided to track down the source and see what else they make.

The Apple Balloon Company of Palatine, Ill., says it provides giant balloons for all kinds of promotions. The big inflatable Case-IH tractor and combine that have shown up in recent years at farm shows, were designed and built by Apple for Case-IH to use at all kinds of events.

Owner Bennett Schwontkowski says it all started in the fall of 1993 when Case-IH launched its Magnum 7200 series tractor. Schwontkowski's company made an inflatable tractor that stood 30 ft. high, 45 ft. long, and 25 ft. wide. It was manufactured and decorated with Case-IH logos and the 7250 model marks. It made its debut at a Wisconsin equipment dealer and was the centerpiece for their customer appreciation day. It toured and made appearances at events around the U.S. and Canada.

The tractor was followed by a giant inflatable combine that promoted the Case-IH 2100 series Axial Flow combine. Scaled at twice the size of a standard combine, the combine was 28 ft. high, 60 ft. long, and 45

ft. wide. Its grain head was 45 ft. across and the grain tank was calculated to hold 2,000 bu.

Both the tractor and combine are tethered and secured by stakes. A pair of fans at the back of each unit keep it full of air. It takes 15 minutes to inflate the tractor balloon. The combine takes a little longer – about 30 minutes to fill with air. Many people think the balloon is hollow. Actually, there are air chambers in each section of the balloon.

Each balloon is hand-sewn. It took 12 weeks to make the tractor, and 16 weeks to make the combine.

Schwontkowski says other companies sell inflatables but none offer turnkey services where everything is done for the customer. His company can provide inflatables of a wide variety of other farm products including seed bags, ears of corn, soybeans, apples, etc. "Today's 3D imaging programs allow us to take a product, logo, or icon and create a 6 to 50-ft. tall inflatable replica. Pricing depends on the complexity."

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Add-On "Funnel" For Truck Endgate

Leon Dick, Mt. Hope, Kan., made a 3-sided extension for his truck's endgate that makes it easier to direct grain into a grain auger's hopper without having to do a perfect job of backing up.

The 3-sided extension is made from a single steel plate bent into a U-shape to form two vertical sides. The unit slips under the endgate and is held in place on each side by a 2 3/4-in. long draw latch.

"It directs grain out in a narrower stream than if it came directly out of the endgate," says Dick. "I use it whenever I unload grain into my bins. My truck has a big endgate in the middle and also one at each corner. I use two extensions on each of my two trucks, one for each corner endgate. I also plan to build one for the trucks' middle endgates."

Dick also came up with a way to keep any of the truck endgates in place at any desired height when unloading grain. It eliminates the need to hold the endgate up by hand. A 5/16-in. threaded bolt with a molded rubber tip at one end runs through a steel bracket that's bolted to the top of the endgate. A gate valve handle is mounted at the other end of



Three-sided extension makes it easier to direct grain into a grain auger's hopper without having to do a perfect job of backing up. Note how plumbing valve holds up endgate.

the bolt. Turning the valve screws the rubber tipped end of the bolt against the truck body to hold the endgate in place.

"It's really handy," says Dick. "In the past I've used a bungee strap to hold the endgate up but it isn't rigid enough. I've also tried using baling wire but it gets in the way all the time."

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Home-built, front-mount 3-pt. hitch allows Robert Davis to cultivate and harvest edible beans with equipment that's out front and easy to see.

"Built-From-Scratch" Front-Mount 3-Pt. Hitch

"It gives our tractor the versatility to do a lot more jobs," says Robert Davis about a front-mounted 3-pt. hitch he made for his Deere 8430 4-WD tractor. It allows the Savannah, N.Y., farmer to cultivate and harvest edible beans with equipment that's out front and easy to see.

The hitch is raised and lowered by a single 5 by 24-in. hydraulic cylinder. It uses the rockshaft, arms, and lower torque shaft support from a 3-pt. hitch on a Deere 5020 tractor. The hitch mounts on a lower support arm that Davis made from 6 by 10-in., 3/8-in. thick steel. The support arm extends back underneath the tractor to provide extra support. The 3-pt. rockshaft mounts near the top of a pair of 4-in. angle irons that are bolted to a steel plate. The plate is bolted to a pair of channel irons that run back alongside each side of the tractor frame.

"I designed it for heavy-duty work. It can lift up to 7,500 lbs.," says Davis. "I use it with a front-mount edible bean windrower, which weighs 5,500 lbs. It's about all the hitch can handle because it hangs out in front a long ways. I also use it with a 24-ft. front-mount field cultivator with wings that are folded by a two-way solenoid valve. I use the field cultivator in the spring to smooth out very rough fields that were chisel plowed the previous fall. I pull another field cultivator or a disk behind the tractor at the same time.

"I spent \$1,200 to build the hitch. Comparable commercial front 3-pt. hitches cost more than \$6,000. I bought the 5020 components from a salvage yard for \$750."

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Reinhardt built a front-end loader for his Case 2670 4-WD tractor to carry two bales up front. A bale fork on the 3-pt. hitch holds two bales or more.

Loader Turns Old 2670 Into Handy Hay Handler

Feeding cattle is a lot faster since Steve Reinhardt, Russell, Kansas outfitted a 1976 Case 2670 4-WD tractor to carry three big round bales at once - and more if he wants it to.

On the 2670's 3 pt. hitch, he mounted a bale fork that will hold two bales easily and up to four if he puts duals on. Then he built a front-end loader, patterned after another loader he owned, to carry two more bales up front.

Since he had a loader to copy, building it was no problem. He bought flat steel, cut the pieces with a torch and put it together with a wire welder. The tough part was mounting it on the frame of the 2670. "I also built the lift cylinder for it myself," he says.

"I chose a 2670 for this for several reasons. First, it's built sturdy enough to handle all the weight. Second, it's shorter than other 4-WD tractors so it's more maneuverable. It already had a 3-point hitch, so it was easier

to put the bale fork on the back. My local Case dealer gives me good support. It has larger tires for a better ride. But mostly, it was less expensive than other 4-WDs with similar horsepower," he says.

Steve's hay handler cost less than \$7,000. He paid \$3,000 for the 2670. It needed some work on the rear end, which cost him another \$250. Steel for the loader was around \$2,000. Finally, he put another \$1,500 into hydraulic cylinders and hoses.

"A lot of guys are using big payloaders to handle hay. My 2670 will handle more bales and was a lot less expensive," he says. Steve would be happy to talk with anyone about how he built the loader. He'd put plans together for a nominal charge if there's interest.

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