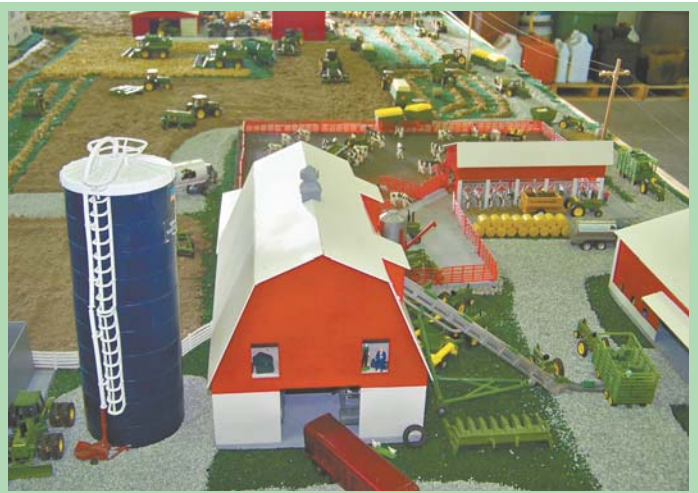




For the past decade, Dusty Ranallo and Cody Molls have set up their giant "mini farm" display at a local steam-threshing show.



This year's 16 by 24-ft. display consisted of eight farms, a farm equipment dealership and a town - all in 1/64-scale.

By Dee Goerge, Contributing Editor

## Giant "Mini Farm" Display Keeps On Growing

What do you do when you're in your 20's and still like to play with farm toys? Dusty Ranallo and Cody Molls found the perfect cover - set up a mini farmstead display for a community event. For the past decade, the Wisconsin cousins have set up a display each year during the Moon Lake Threshermen's Association Threshing Bee in Turtle Lake, Wis., the third weekend in August.

The display keeps growing. The 16 by 24-ft. display in 2009 contained eight farms, a farm dealership and a town - all in 1/64-scale.

They blame Grandpa for their time-consuming hobby.

"Our grandpa started giving us tractors as Christmas presents," Molls says. "Pretty soon, at age 10 or so, we had so much stuff we started setting up at the show."

The farm display evolved from a 4 by 8-ft. sheet of plywood to 3-ft. tall stud walls that support several sheets of plywood topped with 2-in. foam, indoor/outdoor carpet, and real dirt, hay, corn and grains. Roads are made of fine kitty litter. Rivers are cut into the farm.

It takes about four hours to set up the base, before the cousins can "play."

"There's no rhyme or reason to how we set up," Molls says. "He starts in one corner,

and I start on the other, and we meet in the middle."

"We try to include pretty much everything - cash crop farming, dairy and beef farms," Ranallo says. "We try to make it realistic for this area."

It takes 40 to 50 hours to finish the scene. Then for two days the cousins watch everyone from toddlers to senior citizens inspect their work. Some comment on the details they include. Others ask how long it took them to create.

With a shop vacuum to suck up and save some of the material, and totes for the farm toys and buildings, it only takes about three

hours to put the farms away for another year.

The cousins are also considering building a display on a trailer that they could take to other events, including the National Farm Toy Show in Dyersville, Iowa.

"People say we'll probably never grow out of it," Ranallo says.

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## "Casket Tractor" Always Steals The Show

With a souped-up 350 Chevy V-8 engine that puts out nearly 400 hp, Ron Bawek's Massey Harris 44 "casket tractor" out-pulls most competitors.

The "Obituary," as he calls it, pulls in the Exhibition Class at most pulls. The front of the black tractor has a full-size coffin, a tombstone and the Ten Commandments burned into the grill. Bawek has a long, full beard and wears an old-fashioned mortician suit and top hat. Before each pull he walks to the front of the tractor, reads a few verses from a Bible and says a prayer.

"I look a little like ZZ Top, but I classify myself as ZZ Bottom," Bawek jokes.

While the getup may be entertaining, Bawek's goal isn't sacrilegious.

"Some people have never seen the Ten Commandments," he says. A sign on the tractor indicates that it is owned by "The Almighty," and he credits God and his family and friends for helping create The Obituary.

He got the idea for The Obituary after seeing a toy Dracula car with a coffin on front. He decided to adapt the idea to a real tractor.

Bawek had an old, junk Massey Harris 44 tractor with parts missing and a worn-out engine. Bawek extended the tractor frame 4 ft. using parts of a truck frame. He unbolted the front from the back of the tractor and welded and bolted an old truck frame in between.

"I have a little salvage yard so I have different parts to use and didn't have to buy anything," Bawek says. He completely overhauled and rebuilt the Chevy motor. He hooked up the car transmission with the tractor transmission so he has 15 gears altogether.

Bawek built the coffin mostly out of scrap wood. It opens to reveal an angel mannequin at one end. The engine's under the other end.



Ron Bawek's "casket tractor" features a full-size coffin, a tombstone, and the Ten Commandments burned into the grill.

Bawek mounted pipes that look like organ pipes but blast like tractor pulling pipes. He added Model T kerosene headlights to the front.

Altogether, Bawek estimates he spent less than \$500. He has taken it to Conde's tractor pull, an Aberdeen car show and other area events the past couple of years.

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