Air-Ride Forklifts Give Fruit A Bump-Free Ride

Dale Seaquist is a 4th generation cherry grower from Sister Bay, Wis., who's spent nearly 60 years looking for better ways to run his family's business. "Over the years we've built and changed things that have really helped us out," Seaquist says. "Our custom-built forklifts were made by modifying older model pickups with special lift forks and an air-bag suspension. They can carry 1-ton pallets of fruit through an orchard 3 or 4 times faster than the tractors and loaders that we used before."

Seaquist, his son Zach, and another employee came up with the idea to build their own lift trucks after they'd seen a similar rig in Michigan. They removed the truck box and cab from each truck, but kept the motor, drive train, steering mechanism, brakes, and some of the instruments. The rear frame was strengthened to support the lift forks and a 1-ton payload. The springs and shocks were modified to accept 8-in. dia. air bags that are commonly used on semi tractors and trailers. Seaquist says "the air bags compress to support the weight of the truck and its 2,000-lb. payload of cherries, providing a cushioned ride through our orchards and over the road." Diamond plate steel was used to build a new open station seating area, floor and heavy-duty dashboard. Plate steel was also used to build a new low-profile hood and fenders.

The lift trucks are easy to drive, Seaquist says. "We keep the original dashboard with radio, the automatic transmission, the foot pedals and a comfortable seat. We swing the steering to the middle of the truck so the operator can sit at an angle and still see behind the vehicle during orchard and road operation." Hydraulic controls to raise and lower the lift forks are mounted on the platform next to the seat. They also install a 600-lb. bumper on the front to counterbalance the weight of the fruit on the back.

Seaquist says that buying commercially built rigs equipped like his would've cost 4 to 5 times what they have into their home-built rigs. He says they put a limiter on the engine so it can't exceed 2,000 rpm's and overspeed the electric clutch on the hydraulic shift.

"We can haul the full pallets through uneven ground conditions in the orchards, then haul them down the roads at speeds of 50 to 60 miles per hour if we need to." He and his crews can pick more than 900 acres of cherries and 30 acres of apples much faster and more efficiently than they did with tractors and front-end loaders.

Seaquist Orchards is one of the largest producers of cherries and related cherry products in the country, offering more than 500 items online and in their farm market store. Their fruit is grown on about 1,200 acres in scenic Door County, Wis. In a high producing year, they'll handle more than 10 million lbs. of fruit.

Dale Seaquist custom-builds forklifts for orchard use by modifying 3/4-ton, 4-WD pickups with special lift forks and an air bag suspension system.

Seaquist's forklifts carry 2,000-lb. payloads of cherries. Airbags (below) provide a cushioned ride through orchards and over the road.

Seaquist's great grandfather planted fruit trees in the area 150 years ago, and cherry trees started about 115 years ago. Dale is the 4th generation, his sons are the 5th and grandkids now make up the 6th generation to carry the Seaquist name. "All of our families enjoy the work and the fact we've been able to carry this through so many generations makes it very gratifying," Seaquist says.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Dale Seaquist, Seaquist Orchards, 2023 Highview Road, Sister Bay, Wis. 54234 (ph 920-854-4199; www.seaquistorchards.com).

New Way To Propagate Fruit Trees

By Brad Miller

An Alabama inventor has come up with a new twist on the old technique of air layering. Hong Park says his Air Propagator makes propagating fruit trees, shrubs and vines a faster and easier job.

Air layering is a method of reproducing plants by inducing roots to form on the plant stem without cutting off the stem from the parent plant. It's an excellent way to replicate an existing plant with less disturbance of the parent plant. Air layering can produce larger plants which readily mature much faster than growing them from seeds or cuttings.

The process works like this: remove a ring of bark from the stem and enclose the exposed stem with a moist potting soil or peat moss, then keep the stem moist until enough roots for transplant are formed.

Air layering with the Air Propagator clones trees, vines, and shrubs within 45 to 90 days while conventional methods can take as long as 2 to 3 years to bring them to maturity.

Some examples of suitable plants for air-layering include fruit trees, grape vines, blackberries, climbing roses, etc. Other suitable plants include azaleas, maple trees, and nut trees.

The Air Propagator is a plastic ball that comes in two halves, which are filled with the rooting medium and placed around the branch and secured with zip ties. As an option you can buy a unit with one half made of clear plastic, which allows you to see the root growth process without disassembling the unit. The unit comes in a small, medium, and large size and can be purchased individually or in a kit. The kit contains the Air Propagator shells, rooting medium, rooting hormone, zip ties and instructions.

As the owner of Brad's Backyard Nursery in Ridgeville Corners, Ohio, I've successfully used the system. It's super simple and easy to use, and it takes a lot of labor and time out of the propagating process. I've successfully used the idea on peach and pear trees as well as Goji vines. This summer I'm using the Air Propagator on 20 different varieties of fruit and nut trees in my mini orchard.

How-to videos are available on the company's website. A set of two Air Propagators sells for $6 (growing media and root stimulator extra).

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Hong Park, Parkway Greenhouse, 13605 Memorial Parkway S.W., Huntsville, Ala. 35803 (ph 256 650-4644; cell 256 694-2169; www.airpropagator.com).

Air-layering involves removing a ring of bark from the plant stem, and then enclosing the exposed area with moist potting soil until roots form for transplant.

The Air Propagator is a plastic ball with 2 halves which are filled with the rooting medium, placed around the stem, and secured with zip ties.

Several Air Propagators are shown here on a large Fig tree. The process bringS trees, vines and shrubs to maturity much faster than conventional methods.

Forbes Stewart says his handheld nipple feeder makes weaning baby lambs a much easier job. Each lamb gets its own numbered bottle.

Handheld Nipple Feeder For Lambs

Sheep producer Forbes Stewart, Warren, Man., designed this nifty handheld nipple feeder to make weaning his lambs an easier job.

"I use it on lambs from 3 days to 5 weeks old. I like it because it's portable and lets me feed up to 6 lambs at a time," says Stewart, who raises 50 to 60 lambs each spring. "I use it mostly on premature and orphaned lambs. Each lamb gets its own numbered bottle, which makes it easy to control the quantity and type of milk replacer it gets. Also, I can easily pre-warm all the bottles so the lambs always get warm milk which virtually eliminates scours."

The nipple feeder consists of 2 boards spaced about 6 in. apart – a 1 by 6 board on front with a plywood section on back – and is open at the ends, bottom and top. The bottles fit into six 2 1/4-in. dia. holes cut into the front board. There's a handle on top. Each hole is numbered to match up with a numbered milk bottle containing a lamb's particular milk replacer formula.

The holes are lined with duct tape so the bottles won't get scratched and to hold them tight. The outside holes are beveled to hold the bottles outward, providing the lambs with more room and also making the one-handed feeder easier to control. Elastic rings attached to staples are used to help keep the lambs from pulling the bottles out.

"It works great. The lambs come right up to me, and I'm not trying to run back and forth for a single bottle all the time. I always have one hand free to make sure the lambs line up with the right bottle. I think the same idea would work with baby goats and other small animals."

According to Stewart, the handheld portable feeder works better than commercial bottle systems that mount on the side of a pen. "I can control how much milk each lamb gets and the type of milk it gets, which is important because sometimes we feed different ratios of milk replacer to water as we get closer to weaning. Also, younger lambs often need to be fed more frequently which I can easily do with this system. Different lambs drink at different speeds, but with my feeder even the slowest drinker will get his full share. Another advantage is that I can adjust how high I hold the unit, depending on the size of the lambs I'm feeding."

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Forbes Stewart, P.O. Box 361, Warren, Man., Canada R0C 3E0 (ph 204 322-5364).