

Farmers Nominate Best & Worst Buys

before 2006. That pretty much bears out my experience. My first Dodge equipped with a Cummins engine got up to 25 mpg empty and 17 mpg hauling a load. But every Dodge I've owned since then has steadily declined in fuel efficiency.

"I bought one of the first Dodge pickups equipped with a 6.7-liter Cummins diesel in 2007, but gave up on it because it spent too much time at the dealer.

"In 2014 I bought a small 1/2-ton, 2-WD Dodge equipped with a V-6 Fiat engine. It gets good mileage at 23 to 24 mpg and has plenty of power. However, the dealer had to

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replace the filter in the exhaust twice at a cost of \$5,000. Fortunately it was covered by the warranty.

"We now own a 2016 1-ton Dodge dually front wheel drive model. We put a nice Hillsboro aluminum flatbed on it, and added a gooseneck hitch and various other bells and whistles. This pickup weighs 500 lbs. more than the 2006 model it replaced and struggles along at 12 mpg, whereas the 2006 model got 14 to 15 mpg doing the same work. Also, the new model drinks diesel exhaust fluid like Koolaid. For \$50,000 I expected something better. I think this pickup's 'new and improved' automatic transmission is eating up a lot of energy."

Vernon Bratton, San Antonio, Texas: "I've had good luck with tires purchased from **Discount Tire**. The company makes tires for wheelbarrows, mowers, ATVs, cars, trucks and more, and they'll also mount and balance the tires."

Kevin Gull, Guttenberg, Iowa: "The auger trough on our Case IH 1063 corn header was losing corn through holes worn into it, so we bought a **Poly Tech** auger bed trough liner kit which solved the problem (www.polyskid.com; ph 800 542-7659). The liner is precisely cut for your specific header and was easy to install. Last fall we harvested several hundred acres of corn with it and were very satisfied."

David Matejovsky, Wolf Point, Mont.: "Our 2014 **Deere 6150M** loader tractor shifts smoothly and is operator friendly."

John Betka, Butte, Mont.: "My **Winco** multi fuel generator never fails to operate. It's well built and reasonably priced."

He's had problems with his **Bobcat** Toolcat 5600 utility vehicle. "At just 90 hrs., it wouldn't start in cold weather and spent too much time in the shop, making it too expensive to own. It was impossible to access the components, and there were too many electronics. I sent 13 letters to the manufacturer regarding my concerns about the safety and operation of this machine, but they didn't respond. Legal action finally forced them to take the unit back."

Raymond Graftaas, Barnum, Minn.: "My 2003 **Dodge Grand Caravan** has more than 198,000 miles on it, but I've only spent about \$200 on repairs."

He's disappointed with his 2009 **Cub Cadet** LT1550 riding mower equipped with a 3-blade, 50-in. deck. "The problem is that grass clippings build up in the deck after 2 or 3 mowings. When I remove the deck to clean it out, it's not unusual to collect two 5-gal. pails of grass."

Lawrence A. Newcomb, LaCrescent, Minn.: A 2016 **Simplicity** zero-turn riding mower equipped with a 25 hp. engine and

48-in. deck rates as Lawrence's "best buy". "We've owned two other **Simplicity** mowers in the past, a 1967 model and a 1992 model. All three mowers have been excellent machines."

Stephen Herschberger, Tuscola, Ill.: "I'm a foreman on my dad's concrete crew and we use **Gehl** skid loaders - two 4640 models and an R220. The 4640's are almost the perfect skid loader for us. They're small enough to get into most places, yet big enough to handle a lot of material. They have a lot of hydraulic power and ground speed, unlike other skid loader brands that have one or the other but seldom both. The R220 is a real bull when it comes to moving dirt and rocks. The only drawback is all the emission stuff that's on it."

Paul Miller, Sarcoxie, Mo.: "We bought a used **Dixie** chopper mower equipped with a Yanmar diesel engine several years ago and have used it hard ever since, but it just keeps on going. It has about 2,300 hrs. on it with very few problems. A great mower."

Joe Eilert, Jewell, Kansas: "Our 2000 **Deere 7810** MFWD tractor has worked flawlessly, and our **Deere 7710** MFWD tractor has about 10,000 trouble-free hours on it. I think these tractor models are as good as the 4020's of the late 1990's."



He's impressed with **Thunderstruck** heavy duty replacement bumpers for pickups (www.thunderstruckbumpers.com; ph 800 240-9392). We have a lot of deer in our area, but they just bounce off these bumpers when we hit them on the highway."

Robert Horton, Camden, Ark.: "I love my **Cyclone Rake** grass and leaf catcher which I pull behind either my **Sears Craftsman** or **Kubota** riding mower (www.cyclonerake.com; ph 888 531-7253). It's really good at picking up grass and leaves, forming material into a square bale that slides out the back when I tilt the machine. Very easy to use."

Garry Wilkens, Holyrood, Kansas: Garry's happy with his 2012 **Subaru** Outback sports utility vehicle. "It has about 85,000 trouble-free miles on it but has only been back to the dealer once, for a wheel alignment. I do my own service work including oil changes and tire rotations."

"I used my **Black & Decker** 4-in. power grinder once to remove some paint. It wasn't under any kind of load, but in less than 5 min. the drive gears on it failed. The grinder was new, but the company said it was a discontinued model and that parts to fix it were no longer available."

Robert C. Jacobs, Ainsworth, Iowa: "My 2014 **Sydell 930-2** tilt table allows one person to easily perform jobs such as trimming sheep hooves, ear tagging, and so forth (www.sydell.com; ph 800 842-1369). I wish I'd had it years ago."

Duane Spencer, DeFuniak Springs, Fla.: "The instrument cluster gauges on my 2002 **Chrysler Sebring** convertible didn't work right so I sent them for repairs to a company called **Clusterfix** (www.clusterfix.com; ph 509 366-9009). When I got the gauges back they worked even better than before. I highly recommend this company."

"I bought a 2015 **Intertherm** 4-ton air conditioner to replace our 20-year-old model, but after one year it stopped working. The

Pam Dawling, Louisa, Va.: "Polypropylene row covers are a good buy for market gardeners and home gardeners alike. They last longer and are tougher than polyester. Our favorite is **Dupont's Typar Xavan T131**. It has lasted 6 years or more at **Twin Oaks Community's** 3 1/2-acre vegetable garden. It transmits 75 percent of the light.

"We also like **Agribon 19** spun-bonded polypropylene. It weighs less than half as much as Typar and lets in 85 percent of the light.

"The row covers are great at extending the season. For example, **Agribon 19** offers 4 degrees of frost protection. They're also great at protecting plants against insects and cross-pollination.

"**ProtekNet** insect mesh made by **Dubois Agrinovation** is an alternative to row covers in warm weather. Lighter weight versions are translucent nylon, and heavier ones are made from polyethylene. They come in 5 different mesh configurations and sizes and let in water, light and air. Different pests require different versions, sizes and shapes of mesh.

"We've used it to protect nursery seedbeds, cucurbit sowings, broccoli and cabbage transplants and more. It also shields plants from the sun, helping them recover from transplant shock. When no longer needed, it gets packed away for future use.

"Shade cloth is another good buy. It is available in a wide variety of widths and densities. It can be knitted or woven polypropylene or polyethylene, but knitted is about 25 percent lighter and won't unravel when cut. We use 45 to 50 percent (light transmission) shade cloth over hoops for our summer lettuce. We use clothespins to



Photo courtesy Bridget Aleshire
ProtekNet row covers come in 5 different mesh configurations.

attach it to the hoops, and once a bed has been harvested, we move the hoops and shade cloth to the next bed.

"Very dense (80 to 90 percent) shade cloth is great for covering produce on its way to the cooler.

"Shade cloth has been shown to increase pepper production, and **Farmtek Growers Supply** (www.farmtek.com) offers a great set of guidelines for use of various densities of shade cloth. **Gemplers** (www.gemplers.com) also sells a good range of shade cloth. For small areas, we've used scraps of window screen and old tent mesh windows. Anything is better than nothing!

(Pam Dawling is the author of **Sustainable Market Farming** available from www.sustainablemarketfarming.com or from **Sustainable Market Farming**, 138 Twin Oaks Rd., Louisa, Va. 23093).

factory weld on the condenser broke and all the gas escaped. A local company replaced the condenser, but then the unit froze up several times. We replaced the compressor, which had a water line break, but the unit still wasn't working right so a factory repairman replaced the condenser again. Now 1 1/2 years later the fan motor has stopped working. We had to suck out almost 100 gal. of water from a 30-ft. air return duct."

S.R. Wilson, Redford, Mo.: "I haven't had to make any major repairs to my 1973 **Allis Chalmers 160** tractor. It still runs like a top."

He's disappointed with his 2015 **New Holland 110** hp, 4-WD loader tractor. "I bought it in January 2016, and the following spring I was mowing with it when oil started leaking onto the belts, causing them to burn off and the tractor to overheat. The dealer installed new belts and I went back to the field, but the same thing happened again. The dealer came out to pick the tractor up and I traded it for a **Kubota**."

John Collins, Sherburne, N.Y.: John's the satisfied owner of a 2011 **Cub Cadet Yanmar SC 2400** subcompact tractor equipped with a 60-in. deck and 4-ft. loader bucket. "In June 2010 my son David, who owns a local construction company, brought his new **Cub** down to show it to me. I used it to move some dirt on my place and it worked great. So I sold my **Sears** riding mower and got a new **Cub**. I use it to mow 2 acres and for general use. It's a versatile machine that I'd recommend to anyone.

"About 10 years ago I was drilling holes in the frame of an old crawler tractor when I broke a 9/16-in. drill bit. I bought a new bit at a hardware store for \$12 that was made in China, but was able to drill only one hole with it before it failed. I went online looking for drill bits made in the U.S. and found **Kimball Midwest** in Columbus, Ohio (www.kimballmidwest.com;

ph 800 233-1294). I called the company and ordered two 9/16-in. bits. I've used them to make several holes in heavy steel but have never had to sharpen them. Since then I've ordered other bits from this company and am very happy with them. They also carry thousands of tools and other products."

Glenn Bowman, West Gardiner, Maine: "My **Woodland Mills** firewood processor works fantastic (www.woodlandmills.ca; ph toll-free 855 476-6455). It's completely automatic and sells for \$5,999."

Marion Smith, Lubbock, Texas: He says his **Harbor Freight** towable ride-on trencher and **Harbor Freight** electric chainsaw are both "worst buys". "Both products worked for a short time and would probably still be working if parts for them were available at the store level, or if I could've got help ordering them online. But the company offered no parts and no help. I guess you're supposed to use their products once and that's it."

Milford Smith, Darwin, Minn.: A **Ferris** zero-turn riding mower rates as Milford's "worst buy". "When the dealer first showed this mower to me it wouldn't start. He explained that the battery was low and it needed a jump start, which should have been a tip off. Then he had to pull the choke all the way out before the engine would even fire. We got the mower home and the battery was weak so we replaced it with a new one. The dealer just laughed when I told him the machine didn't start very well. Finally it wouldn't start at all and I returned it to him."

Robert Biancuzzo, Southampton, Mass.: Robert bought a used 1999 **Ford F-250 Super Duty** 4-WD pickup equipped with a 7.3-liter turbocharged diesel engine. It had 225,000 miles on it.

"Normally I wouldn't buy a pickup with that many miles, but this one seemed to be

Continued on next page