

"Owner's Report" On Best, Worst Farm Computers

Are you satisfied with your farm computer? What could the manufacturer do to improve it? What's the best software you've found for farm use? What's the worst software you've tried? What farm-related chores do you perform with your computer?

These are some of the questions we asked randomly selected farm computer owners in an effort to highlight equipment that performs with flying colors, and to pinpoint the "lemons" that fail because of poor performance, or failure of the dealer or company to provide service.

Here's how the survey shaped up:

"I've had little trouble but the programs run notoriously slow," says Steve Rash, Union, Iowa, about his 1985 **Commodore 64** computer. "Biggest problem is lack of farm software for the 64. They should make it compatible with IBM and speed up the disk drive."

"I'm satisfied but they should increase the memory size and increase speed and disk capacity," says Duane Madoerin, Williamsburg, Iowa, about his 1983 **Apple IIe**, which he uses primarily for record keeping and budgeting. He'd like to see it adapted to IBM software. "More programs are being developed for IBM."

Delane Thoreson, Climax, Minn., likes his 1983 **IBM PC**. "It's fast and I've never needed a service call. We use it to store crop records and do bookkeeping."

"We use it for all bookkeeping, dairy breeding records, farm inventory, cash flow, and financial planning. Does what we need but it could be speeded up and the memory could be increased," says Mitchell Parkhurst, Weatherby, Mo., about his 1985 **Radio Shack Model IV**.

"My 1985 **IBM XT** has ample capacity to handle all my crop records, inventory, and accounts receivable," says Brymer Humphreys, New Hartford, N.Y.

"It's faster and cheaper than IBM and runs many similar programs. I especially like the keyboard. The only thing it could use is a little more memory," says Lloyd Kentner, Rossville, Ill., pleased with his 1985 **Radio Shack Tandy 1000**.

Gary Hild, Davenport, Neb., is pleased with his 1984 **Commodore 64** computer but says he has trouble finding programs. "Except for one of Commodore's own programs, called Timeworks, I haven't found much. However, I do yield calculations, costs per acre, cash flow analysis, and keep track of inventory. The computer could be speeded up a bit."

"There are getting to be a lot of ag computing programs written for IBM. My 1984 **IBM PC** is easy to run and I can't think of any way they could improve it. Why buy another brand when they're all just copying IBM?" says Michael Olson, White, S. Dak.

John Epler, Northumberland, Penn., owns an **AT&T 6300**. "We're satisfied with it after we expanded it from 256K to 640K. We operate a retail store, a dairy herd and a cropping operation. One problem is that it seems to have a sticky keyboard."

"We're happy with our 1985 **IBM XT** computer. It does everything we

need, including cash flow projections and crop records, and I'll be able to expand it later, if needed," says Roger Kaiser, Carrollton, Mo.

Richard Ness, Ruthton, Minn., owns a 1983 **Apple IIe**. "Works great. We use it for accounting, management records, depreciation, financial statements, cash flow analysis, crop enterprise analysis, and to receive electronic newsmedia. Even though we like it, our next computer may be an IBM because there's more software available and it's faster."

"They should re-design the keyboard," says Robert Merkle, Ashkum, Ill., otherwise pleased with his 1983 **IBM XT**. "It does all the accounting and spread-sheet work I need. I also use it for enterprise analysis, budgeting, and cash flow work."

"Although it's considered obsolete now, our 1982 **Osborne** computer was the original portable computer and came with most of the software basic to any business enterprise. We use it for bookkeeping, 'what-if' spreadsheets, mailing lists, letter writing and swine performance record keeping. Despite its early vintage, it's been reliable, and a good performer," reports Tim Burkey, Dorchester, Neb.

James W. Barker, Ireton, Iowa, has had good luck with his 1984 **Apple Macintosh 128K** computer. "Easy to use and we're continually finding new ways to use it. We haven't had to invest much money in software and we can do enterprise analysis, crop inventory control, break-even analysis for hog enterprise, budgeting for crops and hogs, crop plats, cropping histories, Schedule F for taxes, and so on."

"Retrieving files off the disk drives is too slow. Also having less than 256K is useless. It should be built with 512K," says Mike Fischer, Fairchild, Wis., otherwise pleased with the operation of his 1984 **IBM PC**.

Arlo Gordon, Murdock, Minn., owns a 1985 hard disk **AT&T** computer. "It's very fast and easy to operate and the hard disk is its best feature. It could use a better keyboard, however, with better spacing of keys."

Pat Vermedahl, Polson, Mont., says the 1983 **Morrow MD3** computer ranks as a "best buy". "Works well but there's no dealer within 300 miles. We have to go to the community college for help. But we like it and will probably add more capacity later for general ledger work, and keeping cow records. We find Ag-

ricultural Computing, published by Doane Publications 11701, Borman Dr., St. Louis, Mo. 63146, to be one of our best sources of computing information."

Dale Johnson, Milan, Minn., is pleased with his **IBM PC**. "I owned an IBM compatible computer before and, while it could handle most IBM programs, the key stroke sequences were often awkward because of keyboard differences. Upgrading is a snap with IBM because so many companies produce add-on products. These products don't always work on compatibles."

"My 1983 **Kaypro 4** computer came with all the software I needed, it's fast, and has ample storage for my uses. Best of all, it was priced under \$2,000," reports Bruce Glick, Hartsville, Ind.

Larry Veverka, Richey, Mont., owns a 1984 **Epson QX10**. "It does a good job on farm accounting. We also use it as a word processor to write all our letters and other written communications. Works great."

"The **Cattle Code** computer cattle feeder is our worst buy ever. It's very unreliable and service is extremely poor. The company is unsympathetic to our many problems and the distributor has given up on us. It did keep good herd health records but was otherwise disappointing," says

"The company is unsympathetic to our many problems."

Willis Poezema, Shelbyville, Mich., who also owns a **Radio Shack TRS-80 Model III 48K**. "It's only as good as the operator. Radio Shack lacks useful software for farmers but I do ration formulation, milk weights, and use Visicalc for 'what if' situation planning."

"It has good capacity which we like but it's not IBM compatible. I'd buy an IBM next time," says Harold Kiefert, Valley City, N. Dak., about his **Texas Instruments Professional** computer.

"I bought my **Radio Shack TRS 80 Model III** in 1985 because of the price and because it can be converted to disk drive later. I've found that there are not many programs out for this model because it uses cassettes and because the memory is only 16K. But I like the design of the computer keyboard and screen," says Anthony Ziegler, Easton, Minn.

Ron Christiansen, Delmar, Iowa, is happy with his 1983 **DEC Rainbow** computer. "It's well-built, trouble-free and we've had super support from the dealer. The operator's manual could be somewhat more clear for a new user but, after some experi-

ence, we found the manual does contain the answers if you know what to look for."

"Improve the keyboard. The return key is too small and I don't like having arrows on the numeric key pad. It's a bad place for them when working on spread sheets. Otherwise I am satisfied," says Greg Lefebvre, Elk River, Minn., about his 1985 **AT&T 6300**.

"We run a professional farm management company and use our **Apple Macintosh 512K** for analysis and planning. Many of the people I work with have never used a computer before and I can start them on the Macintosh without sending them to a school for a week. I've worked on many systems, including IBM, and have found that the Apple will do everything any other computer will do," says Jerry Warner, London, Ohio.

"I've had no problems in 18 mos. of use. It's fast, and has sharply defined letters that are easy on the eyes. I've used it for up to 15 hrs. straight with no eye strain," says Frank Oemig, Watertown, Wis., about his 1984 **Sperry 10-meg hard disk drive** with 640K memory. "We do a wide range of work on our computer and have written many of our own programs using KnowledgeMan software, a database program with spread sheet and graphic capabilities. We keep detailed enterprise records that are integrated with our accounting programs so that, for example, fertilizer is automatically charged against the crop when applied and the crop is credited when harvested. One improvement this computer needs is a separate numeric keypad from the arrow keys. This is now available as an option."

"It cut feed consumption in half and feeding properly has also improved herd health and production," says Dennis Cihlar, Masinee, Wis., about his 1985 **Surge** computer feeder which uses a Zenith Z-90 computer as its "brains". "The Zenith works fine in keeping track of cows both on and off feed but the Surge company needs to improve their feeders. We have also bought an **IBM XT** for keeping track of crop and machinery records and for ration balancing. Works fine."

"We're happy with it but we didn't buy enough memory. We've added on since we bought it," says Gerald Beattie, Sumner, Neb., about his **IBM PC** with 196K. "Also, on our machine the cursor is controlled by the number keys. I would prefer separate cursor keys. We keep all farm swine records, do monthly budget comparisons, payroll, depreciation schedules, check writing, keep records of vendors, and so on."

"No other computer can match the performance, per dollar invested, of this computer," says David Archer, Finley, N. Dak., about his 1981 **Radio Shack Tandy 64K color** computer.