

THE PLOWSHARE

News for John Deere Collectors



Ottumwa, Iowa, farmer David Cobler is shown in a field last harvest season. The corn was planted with an antique Deere planter that dropped seeds in small hills, creating clusters of stalks in the long rows.

Special harvest: Farmers use vintage Deere equipment

In a single harvest season, David and D.J. Cobler will span two eras.

The father and son farmers will roll out big, modern John Deere machines to harvest most of the 97-year-old farmstead's tillable acres. But then they'll haul out the old stuff and, with smiles on their faces and the help of other members of the Poppin' Johnnies of Southeast Iowa Club, take the farmstead back to the early years of the last century.

In front of several hundred people who show up to watch, they'll use the previous generation's technology to harvest about 60 acres of corn and beans they've set aside for the purpose. This is a tradition for the club, and others like it across the region.

"Yep, this is our hobby, collecting vintage tractors and farm equipment," David said. "But we don't just collect it. We use it. We let other people use it. We like working equipment. This isn't a museum."

The Coblers own equipment such as John Deere corn shellers and threshing machines from the 1930s; combines from the 1940s and 1950s; and pickers from the 1940s, '50s, and '60s. They even have an operating John Deere grain dryer from the early 1960s.

Even the corn they've set aside for this special harvest was check-row planted with a John Deere 290 Corn Planter from the late 1930s. It drops seeds in hills, evenly spaced from one another, causing stalks to grow together in clumps. It looks different than a modern-day row of individual cornstalks, and the Coblers love it.

Sure, it takes longer to plant and harvest this way. With modern farm equipment, it would only take about six hours to harvest 80 acres of crops. With the vintage equipment, it might take two weeks, and a lot more equipment.

But the Coblers don't mind taking the extra time.

Standing inside an old corncrib on their family's Iowa farmstead, the Cobler men are admiring a 1936 John Deere grain bucket elevator, or cup elevator, that still works.

"Switch it on," 63-year-old David tells his son, 30-year-old D.J.

They watch in appreciation as the belts whirl loudly and begin rotating. David's brother, Chris, smiles and nods his head.

VINTAGE DEERE EQUIPMENT

Photos right, top to bottom:

D.J. Cobler runs a 1936 John Deere grain bucket elevator, or cup elevator, in a barn in Ottumwa, Iowa. This was used to bring crops from wagons to storage bins inside.

The Coblers still run their John Deere No. 6 Corn Sheller, made in the 1960s.

D.J. Cobler, left, and his father, David Cobler, working on their Ottumwa, Iowa, farm last harvest season.

D.J. Cobler hitches a John Deere 3020 Tractor to a John Deere grain dryer from the 1960s.



When the bucket elevator's motor turns off, Chris explains that the machine, attached to a wall inside the two-story corncrib, is used to move corn into storage. After the corn is picked and put into wagons, workers unload it onto a conveyor belt, and it moves into the tall metal elevator, lined with buckets or cups.

Climbing a ladder into the loft, the men point out how the buckets scoop up the corn on the bottom floor, and carry it up into the elevator shaft. When the corn reaches loft height, it gets dumped into an attached chute and poured into storage.

"It still works pretty good," D.J. said.

Then, the group heads outside to inspect a John Deere No. 6 Corn Sheller, made in the 1960s. This sheller, which took corn off the cob, was the company's second-largest model ever made at the time, Chris Boyens, of Heritage Marketing, said.

As technology and equipment changed, so did farming.

"We don't pick corn by the ear anymore," he said. "Now, we use combines that strip the ears for us, so we eliminated the corn sheller, the storage wagon, and the corncrib."

Laughing, David said he still remembers his dad teasing him when he started collecting old tractors in 1977. He didn't understand it.

"But then he started collecting tractors, too," David said, "the exotic, rare ones."

They looked for vintage Deere tractors together. In the 1980s, David got interested in other vintage Deere equipment, like plows and combines. He's been adding a few pieces to his collection every year since then.

He does it to honor his family's farming heritage, and the ingenuity of those John Deere employees who designed and built it to last, he said.

"I do it out of respect for my father and his father, to preserve that history," David said. "I just imagine how excited they must have felt when that stuff came out."

"Those guys back then," D.J. said, "they were the real inventors."



Iconic Deere tractor turns 50

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the launch of the John Deere 4020 Tractor, a revolutionary machine that was to become one of the most popular tractors ever made and help Deere become one of the largest tractor manufacturers in the United States.

It wasn't Deere's first 6-cylinder diesel tractor, but its features and power and its innovative Power Shift Transmission, not to mention its good looks, appealed to farmers during an era of transformation in agriculture. Family farmers were buying land and getting bigger, and they needed more power. The transformation was going on all over the world.

Hans-Christian Quick, who oversees the Deere archives in Mannheim, Germany, said he's heard a lot about the fanfare that accompanied the 4020 to Europe. His father worked for John Deere-Lanz, the company formed in Deere's

purchase of the German tractor maker in 1956. The younger Quick recalls his father's stories about traveling around Europe, carrying the good news about John Deere tractors and especially the 4020.

"It was miles ahead of the European competition," Quick said.

Among the features the 4020 pioneered were a longer rear axle that accommodated a dual-wheel system, and a hydraulic front-wheel drive that increased traction in the field. It also featured the first widely accepted tractor rollover protection structure, John Deere's trademarked Roll-Gard system, launched in 1966 and then made available to the entire tractor industry.

But its biggest claims to fame were lots of horsepower and the Power Shift Transmission. During the model's production, from 1964 to 1972, Deere sold 183,000 of the iconic machines, mostly in the United States

Farmers saw the advantages immediately, especially the increased horsepower in a maneuverable machine, said Chris Boyens, of Deere's Heritage Marketing Group.

"Instead of making two passes through the field to disc and then plant, farmers now had a tractor with enough power to pull a disc with a planter behind it," Boyens said. "It was a major time saver."

And the Power Shift Transmission made field work easier.



4020 Tractor
Standard tread (studio), 1963



#12 Chopper and 115 Chuck
Wagon with 4020 Tractor, 1963



4020 Tractor with KBL Disk Harrow, 1965

"If a 4020 bogged down in the field," Boyens said, "farmers didn't have to idle down and shift gears for more power, losing momentum; they just had to move a lever to get a lower gear and higher RPMs on the go and power through the soft spot."

Although the 4020 was widely seen as a breakthrough in tractors, it was too big for most German farms. It sold well in France and the U.K., though, where farms were bigger. And everywhere, the new tractor helped give a lift to the John Deere brand, Quick said. The 4020 showed farmers that John Deere was innovative, and its products reliable.

The 4020 won new European customers for John Deere at just the right time. The agricultural equipment market was consolidating in Europe, and many of the dozens of companies that started up in the industry during the post-war rebuilding years were foundering.

"Some were around for only two or three years," Quick said.

Deere had been in Europe since before it bought Lanz. Quick remembers going with his father to Hungary, where Deere had been selling tractors since shortly after the war, to show off the 4020 at a trade show.

"The secretary of agriculture was there," he said. "Everyone was there." The 4020 made a big splash.

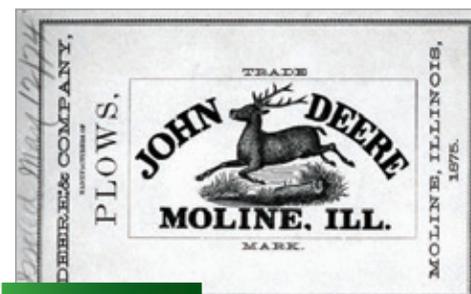
"The main thing was the technological advances the tractor offered," Quick said. "Many farmers admired it, even if it was out of reach for those with smaller farms."

He said even farmers looking for smaller tractors benefited from the innovations. A simplified version of the Power Shift Transmission was developed for smaller, more-affordable models, such as the 30-Series Tractors John Deere was making at the former Lanz factory in Mannheim.

"The 4020 not only gave the company a boost in the U.S., but it put the John Deere brand in focus for the European farmer," Quick said. "From then on, John Deere was recognized not just as the owner of Lanz, but as an important brand."



4020 Hi-Crop Tractor (field), 1963



AUGUST 1868

This month in history

After 31 years of partnerships and sole proprietorships, John Deere and his son Charles incorporated the business under the name Deere & Company. John and Charles agreed that John would be president of the new company, and Charles, then only 31 years old, would be vice president.



Harvesting memories

Here in the Midwest, kids are back in school. Soon, the leaves will be turning brilliant shades of red and gold, and harvest time is right around the corner.

In this issue of *The Plowshare*, we're introducing you to a family who still harvests the old-fashioned way — at least on part of their Iowa farm. I've had the pleasure of knowing the Coblers since my college days. They're great custodians of old-school farming methods, and work hard to share their passion and knowledge with the community at their farm during a special old-fashioned harvest event every year.

If you ever get to see early harvesting methods like the ones the Coblers demonstrate every year, you can really appreciate today's farming methods. Mechanization has done wonders for safety and production. For instance, one person picking corn by hand might be able to harvest an acre or two a day. In 1950, one farmer using the most up-to-date machinery could harvest 30 acres a day. Now, a farmer can harvest 30 acres in less than one hour using a John Deere S-Series Combine.

I think we all reminisce about the "good old days" and wish we could return, even if just for a few minutes. But we forget how hard life was. Picking corn by hand isn't easy, as it would often take a week or two for a picker's hand to become callused enough to harvest a full day without blisters.

Until next time, keep your hand on the throttle and your plow in the ground.

Brian Holst
Manager, John Deere Heritage Marketing

THE PLOWSHARE

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DID YOU KNOW?

The Long Green Line

Deere & Company coined the phrase “The Long Green Line” in the 1960s to market its tractor and implement line, and sent a train — three quarters of a mile in length — around the U.S. to show off its “long green line” of products. Deere was also celebrating record-breaking sales and its rise above the competition, which made Deere the largest farm-equipment maker in the world.

*John Deere coined the phrase “The Long Green Line” to market its tractor and implement line.
Photo from 1966*