

The Well-Equipped Farm

When you only own a Thoroughbred or two, and someone else is responsible for their care, the only equipment you need is a checkbook and a pen. But bring the horses home, and it's a whole new ball game. Equine training or breeding farms might not be "agricultural" by the standards of someone running a 500-head dairy operation, but they're plenty agricultural enough to require some equipment over and above your pickup truck. What is your operation going to need in order to run smoothly? What's essential, and what might be overkill?

HEAVY METAL

Most who've been there would agree the first investment you need to make is

*What's essential,
and what can you
live without?*

a good, solid tractor. In most cases, we're not talking about a half-million-dollar, three-story-tall combine that shakes the earth and requires an airplane hangar to store, but an agile, user-friendly, versatile model that still has enough guts to do the multi-tasking required on a horse farm. Just which tasks you expect of it will determine the size, horsepower, and bells and whistles your perfect tractor sports.

Consider a tractor a power source for all the implements you'd like it to run. These add-ons attach to the tractor in one of

three ways: pulling power, power take-off (PTO), and hydraulics.

Simple pulling can be done via the draw bar. This might mean transporting a hay wagon or pulling your horse trailer out of the mud.

The PTO is a spinning driveshaft that can, depending on the tractor's design, power implements attached behind, in front, or even under the "belly" of the tractor. Think post-hole diggers, manure spreaders, and Bush Hogs.

The hydraulic system raises and lowers a three-point hitch in the rear, or a front-end loader, bucket, spike, and other movable attachments in the front.

Even small tractors today tend to have all three power options, although machines in excess of 30 years of age might lack the hydraulics. When you're tractor



A good, solid tractor is a necessary investment for a well-equipped farm

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shopping, consider the implements you'll want the machine to run and make sure they're compatible and your tractor has adequate horsepower to operate them. If you only have a half-dozen

horses on your property and only a few acres, you might be able to get away with a heavy-duty garden tractor (in essence, a glorified riding mower), that can mow, pull a small trailer, and run one of the small manure spreaders. But for anything larger than that, you'll want a compact utility tractor, an in-between machine that is smaller than a true 150-horse-

power agricultural tractor, but hefty enough to fulfill almost any function on a horse farm, while still taking up relatively little parking space.

Any tractor with a horsepower greater than 22 HP but less than 150 HP is classified as a compact utility, but the average is about 35-40 HP, which is more than



When shopping for a tractor, consider the compatibility of implements you will want to use, and make sure the tractor you purchase has adequate horsepower

adequate to operate the number one implement on a horse farm: a manure spreader. More on those in a moment. In addition to the sheer power of a compact utility tractor, you'll likely want the following features:

- Four-wheel drive since you'll be dealing with uneven terrain, mud, and/or snow;

- Hydrostatic transmission, making your tractor an automatic instead of a stick-shift;

- Front-end loader, with which you'll be able to scoop and carry dirt, manure, hay bales, railroad ties, and just about anything else;

- Diesel engine (rather than gas). Diesels can be difficult to start when they're cold, but they're more powerful than a similarly sized gas engine, do more work per gallon, and are mechanically less troublesome in the long run. Because diesel fuel is less volatile than gas, it's also a little safer to store around the farm.

- ROPS, which stands for "rollover protection system," is a safety feature that prevents the tractor from rolling over and crushing its operator. It won't prevent the machine from tipping over, but it will support its weight in case of an accident and allow you to crawl out of danger. Most ROPS are capable of temporarily folding out of the way if you need to park the tractor in tight quarters or drive under low-hanging branches.

- An automatic shut-off for the PTO drive, which activates whenever you leave the seat of the tractor. This safety feature for power attachments means you won't get accidentally shredded if you have to tinker with your Bush Hog or snow blower.

ATTACHMENTS WORTH HAVING

Back to the important topic of manure spreaders. If you have an appreciable number of stalls to muck, a manure spreader can be an invaluable addition to your equipment arsenal, allowing you to put that manure to work fertilizing your hay fields or unused pastures. Remember, it's not a good idea to spread fresh manure on pastures being currently grazed, as you can spread parasite eggs that way.

Manure spreaders have an apron chain on the floor of the spreader bed, which rotates from front to back, under the bed and back to the front again. These feed the manure and bedding to the beaters, which throw the contents out behind. You can adjust the spreader application rate of your manure spreader by changing the speed of the conveyor, changing your driving speed, or on some spreaders, by chang-

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ing the height of the end-gate.

Most manure spreaders are powered by the PTO, although the smallest models are sometimes ground-driven. Ground-driven manure spreaders only operate when the wheels are revolving (they won't spread manure when your tractor is stationary), and they tend to be mechanically simple, with fewer moving parts. But PTO-driven units are far more powerful and can hold more material per load.

When you're shopping for a manure spreader, bear in mind their capacity is measured in bushels, which is roughly the size of a plastic muck-bucket. An average horse in an average-sized stall will produce one to two bushels of manure and soiled bedding a day, and manure spreaders can range from five-bushel mini-models on up to those that can accommodate more than 40 bushels at a time. For those who'd like to muck their stalls directly into the spreader and head out in the field, it's best to choose a model that can be easily driven down your barn aisle.

The second-most-desirable tractor implement on a horse farm is a Bush Hog, which is like a lawnmower with attitude.

*Consult with your
local farm dealer
to determine what
types of implements
would make your
life easier*

A Bush Hog won't give your front lawn a golf-green trim, but it will make short work of thickets of weeds in your pasture and around your fencelines, even to the point of taking out scrub saplings four inches thick. If you have a large acreage to care for, you'll find you get lots of use out of this attachment.

Thoroughbred breeder Linda Plank of Ingersoll, Ontario, Canada, said, "There's hardly a week that goes by that we don't find a use for our Bush Hog from May through November."

Bush Hogs are rotary mowers (as opposed to sickle-bar mowers, which are used to cut hay, and hammer-knife mow-

ers, which mulch lawn clipping and produce a smooth finish). They range in width from three feet to more than 25 feet, with one or a number of blades spinning and throwing cuttings out to the side. The five- to 10-foot models most popular with horse-property owners can be operated by a utility tractor, and some are available as "belly-mount" attachments, which can be a little easier for a beginner to maneuver around fences and gates.

A scraper blade, which typically mounts on the rear three-point hitch, is great for leveling driveways, moving light snow, and scraping manure out of run-in sheds. And a front-end spike, which can replace the front bucket, is essential if you're moving large round bales of hay weighing several hundred pounds each.

If you have fencing to install or maintain, you might also want to invest in a post hole digger (aka an auger), which is like a humongous drill bit turned by the PTO and raised and lowered by your tractor's three-point hitch. Most people only have to dig a few post holes manually to be convinced of the value of a tractor-powered model.

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Texas	2,952	1,289	44%

Number of mares in parentheses were covered in the Northern Hemisphere on Southern Hemisphere time.

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use of such attachments, you might want to investigate renting them rather than purchasing them. Many farm-implement dealerships will rent equipment like post hole diggers by the day or by

the week, quite economically. You just need to ensure that what you're renting is compatible with your particular tractor.

Many horse farms do find it's worth getting a chain harrow or drag. Drags are fairly simple implements, consisting of a weighted section of flat chain (sometimes just a cast-off section of chain-link fence with lumber or a couple of tires attached to each end). Some have vertical spikes, which help aerate the soil, as well as being useful to break up manure piles in the pasture, de-thatch turf, and smooth and level the footing in arenas and training tracks.

If yours is a training facility, you can do a certain amount of track maintenance with a \$500 chain harrow, although if you're serious about your track surface, you'll want to invest in a track conditioner, a much more sophisticated implement which costs considerably more. Chain harrows require little horsepower and no PTO; they're simply pulled behind your tractor, while some track conditioners are equipped with hydraulics to allow the user to adjust the depth to which the teeth penetrate your track surface, establishing a consistent, even surface.

Larcom and Mitchell, a Delaware, Ohio-based family company that specializes in equipment for conditioning Thorough-



Making your own hay requires a serious financial investment, as well as time and effort

bred, Standardbred, and even Greyhound tracks, has four different sizes of track conditioners for Thoroughbred surfaces, from eight feet wide to 13 feet, three inches. President David Mitchell explained, "Our track conditioners are hydraulic, so they need a fair-sized tractor to operate. The compact utility tractors could run an eight-footer, but you'd need at least 65HP for the larger models. We suggest a tractor with eight horsepower per foot.

"The conditioners have an optional level bar attachment, which is helpful if you don't have regular access to a grader," he added. "You can't go as fast with a track conditioner as you can with a harrow—especially with the level bar on it—but it does a more thorough, consistent job. We

also have a float which seals the track when it's wet."

Finally, if you live in a northern climate, consider the value of a serious snow blower. It might not be much fun to be huddled on a tractor seat running one of these implements in January, but it beats clearing your driveway by hand, especially if yours is a typical half-mile-long farm road. Your tractor's front bucket can be useful to some extent for scooping snow, but it's inefficient and tedious compared to the high-volume snow-moving of a real snow blower.

REAL FARMING

Suppose you have ambitions not just of moving things around your farm, but of producing your own hay. This task requires a whole different level of horsepower, with a real agricultural tractor (more than 50 HP) and a series of implements, including a haybine (aka mower/conditioner), a rake, a tedder (which fluffs up the hay for quicker drying), and of course at least one baler (different implements produce different types of bales, from small squares to larger round bales). Hay making requires a serious financial investment, not to mention time and effort, so you'll need to calculate whether your acreage is sufficient and the outcome valuable enough to make it worth doing, as opposed to buying hay from another source.

For many horse farms, it's more practical to contract the cutting and baling of your hay out to a local farmer who has already made the investment in the equipment. Many will harvest your hay in exchange for a percentage of the crop. The downside of an arrangement like this is

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that you're often down the priority list, meaning your hay will be cut only after the farmer has taken care of his own fields. Between that, and being at the mercy of the weather, that might mean your hay crop is over-mature or gets rained on before it is baled, and you'll be stuck with it. Doing it yourself means having more control, but it's likely only practical for those with large acreages, lots of manpower, and large herds to feed.

OTHER MOTORS

Whether you have grown it yourself or purchased it elsewhere, when you've got horses, you'll have hay to move. Putting a year's worth of hay in your barn is a labor-intensive job made somewhat easier if you have a hay elevator, a motorized ladder that transports square bales up to a second story and/or to the top of the stack inside the barn.

Most hay elevators are run not by a tractor's PTO, but by a small electric motor (which might be sold separately), and of course there are different lengths, sizes, and powers to consider depending on your situation. If you'll need to use

your elevator in more than one location, you'll also want a transport trailer for it, a right-angle-shaped support of tubular steel, equipped with wheels and designed to hitch to your truck or tractor. Some allow you to adjust the angle of the elevator to simplify towing and, in some cases, might mean you can leave the elevator on its transport frame when in use.

If you have horses in training and a shortage of staff to walk them cool, you might also want to consider another motorized device for your farm: a hotwalker or "horse walker," aka Equi-ciser.

What's the difference? A hotwalker is like a merry-go-round for horses, with three or more arms radiating from a central motor (protected by a metal casing). Horses are tied to the overhead arms by their halters and led slowly in a circle until their coats are dry after baths or their heart rates return to resting rhythm after working. An Equi-ciser is a somewhat more sophisticated machine that moves a series of barriers in a circle between an inner and an outer fence. Horses are turned loose in the eight-to-12 foot spaces between the barriers, which are propelled by a similar small motor. They can walk,

trot, or canter freely between the gate in front of them and the gate encouraging them forward from behind.

While a hotwalker will set you back something in the region of \$2,000-\$4,000, Equi-cisers start at about \$12,000 and go up from there depending on size and the number of horses they'll accommodate (and whether you purchase the necessary fencing with the unit or install it yourself). The advantage of the more expensive machine is that it can do more than just cool horses out; it can serve as an alternate form of exercise for a number of horses simultaneously, doing some of the conditioning work for you. Which is the most useful appliance for your farm is up to you.

TAKE-HOME MESSAGE

There's no end, of course, to the motorized gadgets at your local farm dealer, all designed to make someone's life easier. What will work best for you, and what can you live without? That's something only a conversation with your dealer, your good judgment, and of course your budget can determine for sure. 🐾

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