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FARMING FUN

Whether the appeal of farm toys is rooted in actually working the land, or the nostalgic tug harkening back to the playful days of youth, collectors are reaping large-scale rewards in small-scale toys.

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Trend Spotting: Plotting a Course With Online Tools

Knowing where to find it, and how to use it, data that online tools provide can tell you whether interest in your inventory is waxing or waning — a necessity for sales success.

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Fulper Pottery: Early Efficiency Segues To Modern Elegance

Ushered by progressive master craftsmen, Fulper Pottery's transition from producing practical wares, to creating enduring decorative Arts & Crafts designs, is an unlikely journey of which collectors are sometimes unaware.

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Bidding Online for Stooges

The Three Stooges produced 174 comedy shorts for Columbia Pictures from 1934 to 1956. Robert Edward Auctions is excited to be offering the only known one-sheet poster for the comedy group's first film for the studio — 1934's *Woman Haters* — during its next online auction.

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Maumee Valley Historical Society Antique Show • Maumee, Ohio

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◀ Arcade Four Piece Farm Machinery Set #341, cast iron, with original box, red painted Fordson tractor; Oliver plow; two farm wagons, one with nickel wheels; and all with original Arcade Toy decal, sold for \$724 in 2009. The Arcade Manufacturing Co. produced toys from 1921 until 1943. Photo courtesy Heritage Auctions

CULTIVATING A LIFETIME PASSION FOR FARM TOYS

Antoinette Rahn

For some, the appeal of farm toys is steeped in memories of working the land, actually using the full-size versions of the tractors and implements that become cherished collectibles. For others, it may be a response to a nostalgic tug that harkens back to the playful days of youth, when a toy tractor and “farming the carpet” held endless possibilities of adventure.

“I can remember as a child riding through the country with my parents, who were teachers, and looking at all the tractors and using that as a way to learn my colors,” said Jason Hasert, owner of ToyTractorTimes.com, an online site that provides farm toy news and houses the popular forum Toy Talk, where collectors meet online to talk about tractors and much more.

Regardless of what draws one into the farm toy community, it is a world that seems to reflect the same camaraderie of the farming community depicted in tales and art of days past.

That may seem like a lot of symbolism for toys that measure 1/64 to 1/16 of the real thing, but it’s also part of what brings people together and entices multiple generations to join the fold. It’s something that plays out each year at toy shows across the country, explains Amanda Schwartz, manager of the National Farm Toy Museum, in Dyersville, Iowa — also the city that serves as the site for the National Farm Toy Show — held each year in November.

“The thing I have observed from being in my position at the National Farm Toy Museum, regarding the toy show’s attraction, is that it is almost like a family reunion of sorts. Collectors, dealers and newcomers realize very quickly that toy shows are a way to connect face to face. Being able to ask questions and share knowledge and experience about the hobby is key to how the farm toy hobby continues today; it’s about the people.”

Cathy Scheibe — who pioneered the farm toy collecting com-

munity along with her late husband Claire by founding the National Farm Toy Show, along with Toy Farmer and Toy Trucker magazines, monthly publications serving the community to this day — echoed the sentiment about it being as much about the camaraderie among collectors as it is the toys.

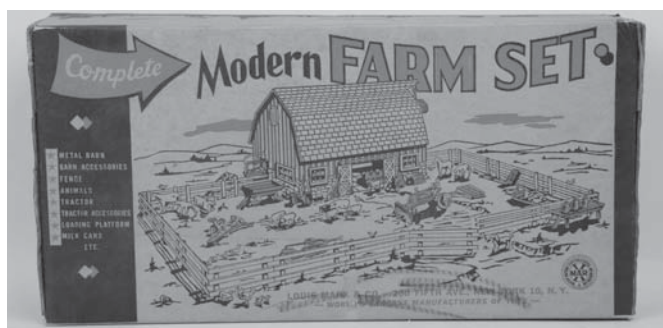
“It’s not always about buying; it’s the long-term friendships so many people have made that keep them coming back to the shows year after year,” said Scheibe, who was inducted with her husband into the National Farm Toy Museum’s Hall of Fame in 1992.

Schwartz reports that more than 5,000 people were in attendance at the National Farm Toy Show in November 2014, and others say the diversity of people attending shows and showing interest in farm toys, as well as their approach to collecting, is exciting to witness.

As with anything, things have changed in the farm toy market since the collecting bug took hold in the 1970s. From the years when shelf models dominated the scene, to the arrival of collector editions/custom models, precision models, pedal cars, expansion into farmstead sets and dioramas, the farm toy marketplace continues to evolve.

“In the 27 or so years I’ve been in the hobby, it has gone from the availability of a few basic toys to a much wider variety with impressive detail,” said farm toy dealer Trevin Greene. Greene and his wife Beth operate Farm Toys For Fun, based in Fairfax, Iowa. “The hobby has also changed with the times as 3D printing, high quality castings and other manufacturing practices have become available.

“When I first started, the only difference in a tractor you might collect was the tire or the rivets or the color of the cab, and a person would collect many variations of the same tractor. Now, there are so many makes and models produced it can make



This largely complete early version of Marx's Modern Farm set, including the original box and instructions and inserts, sold for \$180 during a May 2014 auction at Morphy Auctions. The Modern Farm set was the first of one of these types of sets issued by Marx, beginning in the 1950s, and the farm set remained in production during the entire time Marx produced this type of playset, according to "Marx Toys: Robots, Space & TV Characters," by Schiffer. Photo courtesy Morphy Auctions, Inc.



The National Farm Toy Show, held in Dyersville, Iowa, has been serving the interests of collectors since the late 1970s. The show, which is referred to as the 'Granddaddy of farm toy shows' was founded by Claire and Cathy Sheibe, owners of Toy Farmer magazine. Photo courtesy Jason Hasert, ToyTractorTimes.com.

your head spin!" Greene explains.

One of the many benefits of an evolving and diversifying market is the greater opportunity for something to resonate with a potential collector. Hasert sees that in the topics people are seeking information about, farm toys they are interested in acquiring and the things that attract new and even returning fans of farm toys.

"One of the most popular features on our site is the Toy Talk forum, and there we've seen a lot of interest in things beyond toy tractors," said Hasert, who launched ToyTractorShow.com in 2002, the same year he purchased Toy Tractor Times magazine and fused the two to create a site where people can explore the hot topics in farm toys, learn about the latest releases and access articles from the past and present. "Some of the more popular farm toys today are the high horsepower four-wheel-drive 'muscle' tractors and combines for harvesting grain. The hobby is growing to include detailed farm displays, much like the layouts used in the train hobby. These displays include model tractors, implements, harvesters, barns, animals, etc."

Schwartz echoed Hasert's observations, speaking to the level

AUCTION PRICES REALIZED

- Arcade Farm Set No. 686, featuring an Oliver tractor, corn planter, disc harrow, mower and gang planter, as well as a seldom-seen Oliver pennant, complete with its original box, finished at \$780 during a December 2014 auction presented by Morphy Auctions.
- Lot of two die-cast John Deere models, including a tractor and an Industrial Crawler, both 1:16 scale, made by Ertl, circa 1950s, including original boxes, sold for \$600 at auction in August 2011, through Morphy Auctions.
- Lot with a stamped steel John Deere manure spreader, short levers and rubber tires, circa 1950s; die-cast John Deere tractor, with a closed flywheel, circa 1940s, Ertl; a John Deere Wagon, flare box, rubber tires; John Deere disk, by Eska, all 1:16-scale, fetched \$216, during a January 2010, auction offered by Stout Auctions.
- A trio of John Deere stamped steel farm toys, including a loader, corn picker and combine, made by Eska, circa 1950s-60s, realized \$450 during a September 2014, auction offered by Morphy Auctions.
- Lot of six John Deere painted pressed steel farm toys, including a grain driller, plow, disc harrow, spreader, wagon with flare box and combine unit, circa 1950s, by Eska, containing some minor rusting and accompanied by original boxes, topped \$1,500 during an auction presented by Lloyd Ralston Gallery in February 2012.
- Lot of seven Tru-Scale pressed steel farm toys including a combine, baler, disc, spreader, grain drill, barge box, wagon, tractor, circa 1960s-70s, with rust and paint flaking in spots, sold for \$570 during a February 2013, auction presented by River Valley Auction Co.
- A 12-inch McCormick Deering Thresher, cast iron, by Arcade, with a grain pipe, spoke wheels, circa 1925, sold for \$300 during a 2009 auction through RSL Auction Co.
- Lot of four John Deere farm toys including a plow, farm wagon (flare box), disc harrow and tractor, 1:16-scale, realized \$450 during a September 2014 Morphy Auction.
- Cast iron Oliver spreader, by Arcade, rubber tires marked "Arcade Balloon," body features "Oliver 7 Superior" decal, 1:16-scale, circa 1940s, some pitting to bare metal parts and minor chipping to paint, commanded \$192 during an August 2011, auction offered by Morphy Auctions.
- Britains Model Farm Range set, circa 1950s-60s, featuring seven pieces: steer, pig, two sheep, hog, horse, and a post-war land girl figure, in the original box, in excellent condition, realized \$189 during a June 2014 auction presented by Old Toy Soldier Auctions. *The Britains line is now owned by Ertl.
- An early model of the Marx Modern Farm Set, which included the farm, tin silo, animals, fences and equipment, along with the original box, paper packaging, instructions and inserts, with some minor wear and damage to the box, fetched \$180 during a May 2014, auction presented by Morphy Auctions.
- Lot of seven pressed steel Tru-Scale farm implement models, including an elevator, plow, loader, spreader, two balers and trailer, 1:16-scale, circa 1970s, sold for \$150 during an October 2014, auction presented by Rich Penn Auctions.

of diorama design featured at the most recent National Farm Toy Show.

“At this past year’s National Show the creativity of dioramas/ displays was just astounding,” she said. “It is this new talent that continues to fuel the hobby and a friendly competition to do something that has never been done before.”

However, that’s not to say that interest in the scale models has diminished, she added. As younger collectors seem to gravitate toward the 1/64 scale and custom models, in general there

has been an increased interest in 1/8th scale models, as well as pedal tractors and custom pedals, too. At the National Farm Toy Museum, visitors can view an expansive scale display, a life-size John Deere tractor cutout with 1/16, 1/32, 1/43 and 1/64, and a County Fair Diorama that often prompts many of the 25,000 people who visit the museum every year to share stories of memories living and working on the farm, Schwartz said. The diversification of features, and educational programs offered at the museum and shows is part of the community’s efforts to continually attract new fans and collectors.

Reflecting on auction results and interactions with dealers and collectors, Dan Matthews, petroliana/automobilia advertising expert with Morphy Auctions, reports that items driving the high-end market today are the same type of farm toys that have done so for the last 10 to 15 years, with some new developments.

“Original farm toys with original boxes remain popular, and four-wheel-drive toy tractors keep going up in price,” he said. For example, some four-wheel-drive toy tractors that sold for \$150 to \$300 not so long ago, now command \$600 to \$700.

In terms of antique and vintage farm toys accompanied by original boxes, during a December 2014 auction presented by Morphy Auctions, a complete Arcade Farm Set, a series dating back to the 1950s and ’60s, with cast iron toys and original box, sold for \$780 (with buyer’s premium). It was one of a few vintage farm toys to come to the market, many with original boxes, in recent months. (View more in the Prices Realized on page 23.)

Another aspect of the farm toy community that’s evolved over time is the scale. Hasert reports that while 95 percent of today’s farm toys produced in the U.S. are 1/16, 1/32 and 1/64 scale, some select models have been produced in 1/8, 1/12, 1/20, 1/43, 1/50 and 1/87-scale. Plus, in Europe, where the farm toy market is very active, the most common scale sizes are 1/32 and 1/87.

In terms of how people focus their farm toy collections – be it by type, brand or even color – that, too, may reflect the collector’s own farming experiences, said Greene.

TO LEARN MORE

Events

- Summer Farm Toy Show (30th anniversary): June 5-6, 2015, Dyersville, Iowa. For more information, visit www.nationalfarmtoymuseum.com or call 563-875-2727.
- 38th Annual National Farm Toy Show: Nov. 6-8, 2015, Dyersville, Iowa. For more information, visit www.toyfarmer.com or call 800-533-2893.

Visit www.toyfarmer.com or www.toytractortimes.com for information about state and local farm toy shows across the United States.

Resources

- Toy Farmer magazine, available in print/digital or a print/digital combination. Visit www.toyfarmer.com or call 800-533-2893.
- Toy Tractor Times, available in an online membership. Visit www.toytractortimes.com, email contact@toytractortimes.com or write The Toy Tractor Times at PO Box 40, Pembroke, KY 42266.
- Dick’s Farm Toy Price Guide & Check List (1/32 & 1/16 Tractors and Machinery 1886-2014), paperback. Visit Bossen Implement at www.bossenimp.com or call 563-924-2880 to order.
- Standard Catalog of Farm Toys, 3rd. Ed. Edited by Karen O’Brien, Contributing Editor Kate Bossen, paperback. Visit www.amazon.com to order.
- American Farm Collectibles: Identification and Price Guide, 2nd Ed. by Russell E. Lewis, paperback. Visit www.amazon.com to order.

Museums

- National Farm Toy Museum, 1110 16th Ave. Ct. SE, Dyersville, Iowa. Open 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily (except on holidays). Visit www.nationalfarmtoymuseum.com or call 563-875-2727.
- The Toy Farmer Museum, Highway 13 near LaMoure, N.D. Open Mon.-Fri. 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sat. noon to 5 p.m. (Oct. 1-April 31) and Mon.-Fri. 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. and Sat.-Sun. noon to 5 p.m. (May 1-Sept. 30). Visit www.toyfarmer.com/museum or call 800-533-8293.
- FARMALL-LAND USA, I-80 & Hwy. 59, Avoca, Iowa. Open by appointment during the winter months, regular hours begin in April. Visit www.farmall-land-usa.com or call 712-307-6806.
- Heartland Acres Agribition Center, 2600 Swan Lake Blvd., Independence, Iowa. Open 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. year-round, plus Sundays from noon to 4:30 p.m. during the summer (except on holidays). Visit www.heartlandacresusa.com or call 319-332-0123.



Custom tractors, like this high detail 1/16 scale Massey Ferguson 1150 V-8 Power Tractor, are another popular category of collectible among farm toy collectors. The tractor is the 2014 Toy Tractor Times Anniversary Tractor, and is available at www.toytractortimes.com. Each year the group issues a new tractor, and the 2015 model will be announced in March. Photo courtesy Jason Hasert, ToyTractorTimes.com.

“Farm toy collecting can be anything the collector wants it to be. Some people focus only on what they have on their own farms, while others collect everything. It’s interesting to see the many variations of how a collector pursues the hobby from the beginner to the long-time buyer and everything in between,” said Greene, who purchased Farm Toys for Fun, a 31-year-old business, in March 2014. “Some people will buy the toys to play with, while others will use them in displays, and others only keep them on a shelf in the package.”

Allegiance to brand also plays a role in farm toy collecting, just as it does in traditional farming. Some of the big brands in farm toys remain as popular today as they were when the hobby really started to gain a following in the 1970s. John Deere, Case IH and AGCO all have loyal followings, while New Holland also offers many options on a more global scale, Hasert said. The uniqueness of AGCO is that it includes classic brands such as Allis-Chalmers, Oliver, Minneapolis-Moline and others.

As both Greene and Hasert mention, custom and collector series toy tractors certainly have their own following.

“I would agree that the big name brands are still the hot commodity among the majority of collectors. However, the custom toy world is expanding rapidly,” Greene said. “The major manu-

facturers can’t produce everything that a person needs to fill in their collection, and that’s where the custom builders have their spot.”

While the number of Toy Tractor Times anniversary tractors produced each year has decreased some, it’s a series that provides an avenue to establish a collection, and in some cases introduce people to different types of tractors, Hasert added.

When it comes to advice for someone looking to join the farm toy collecting community, the No. 1 rule (as with anything) is to collect what you really like, Matthews said. Additional pearls of wisdom about farm toy collecting include: Take the time to gain as much information as possible by attending shows, visiting museums, talking to other collectors and turning to resources like Dick’s Farm Toy Price Guide, Toy Farmer magazine, Toy Tractor Times and the Standard Catalog of Farm Toys, among others, said Hasert, Scheibe and Schwartz. Plus, strive to have fun in collecting, said Greene. ■

Antoinette Rahn is Online Editor for Antique Trader. In addition to her love of Irish antiques – inspired by her late Irish grandmother– she has a penchant for collecting petroliana and vintage advertising items. She lives in Wisconsin with her husband, Tom.

A little something about scale



1:64-scale

This small size has become a big-seller in the past two decades or so. These “Matchbox-sized” toy tractors have nice detail, but don’t dominate a den or basement quite like the 1:16-scale models do. Plus, they’re an inexpensive collectible and easily modified. You see a lot of 1:64-scale layouts at the shows, featuring almost every variety of tractor imaginable. Some of the historical sets produced by Ertl in the early 1970s have been known to command fairly high MIP prices.

1:43-scale

Another popular European scale, seen most often in Corgi, Dinky, and some Matchbox farm equipment. Ertl also produced a nice line of tractors and automobiles in this scale beginning in 1988 and then returning with an expanded variety in the 1990s. Although not quite the 1:48-scale needed for O-scale model railroads, they add great detail to a layout.

1:32-scale

Popular in Europe, especially in the Britains line, 1:32-scale started making real inroads in the United States in the 1970s. Maybe with everyone scaling back because of the energy crisis, smaller-scale toys seemed to make sense. Ertl began mirroring its 1:16-scale line in a downsized version, and in the 1980s released a series of 1:32-scale battery-operated tractors with working Power Take-Off.

1:16-scale

This scale is really the king of farm toy production. As far back as the 1920s, Vindex made cast-iron threshers and machinery in 1:16-scale, and it has remained a favorite ever since. The size is well suited for plenty of detail and play-use. After the Second World War, Eska, Ertl, and Carter Tru-Scale set the pattern for 1:16 to be the dominant farm toy scale in America.

**Source: Standard Catalog of Farm Tractors, 2nd. Ed. Edited by Karen O’Brien (with some updated details)*