

You would be hard-pressed to find people who don't have a favorite childhood toy — something they can fondly recall playing with, just like it was yesterday.

With the onset of adulthood, toys usually get pushed aside and become nothing more than distant memories. But many adults have decided not to turn their backs on toys. In fact, people of all ages are collecting toys of all types, including an enthusiastic group devoted to small-scale farm toys.

Today's marketplace is filled with farm toys in a variety of scales, everything from tractors and combines to planters and other implements. For more discerning collectors, there are also choices when it comes to ag equipment brands. Are you a John Deere (green) person, or do you like Case IH (red)? Or is New Holland (blue) more your style? Deciding what to collect is something any collector has to determine, and it's no different in the world of farm toys.

As the owners of Farm Toys For Fun (*farmtoysforfun.com*), Trevin and Beth Greene of Fairfax, Iowa, know firsthand the tastes and preferences of today's farm toy collectors. Their business stocks more than 1,500 different 1/64-scale farm toys produced by manufacturers including Ertl, Die-Cast Promotions, and Spec Cast. For collectors interested in particular equipment brands, they have toys representing Case IH, John Deere, Massey Ferguson, Ford, AGCO, and more.

Farm Toys For Fun has been a part of the toy marketplace for 32 years, but Trevin and Beth just recently completed their first year as its owners. They bought the company from the original owners, Al and Cathy Van Kley. Trevin worked for the Van Kleys for several years and

has been a farm toy collector himself for more than 25 years. The transition from collector to employee to owner has been years in the making, but it has revolved around one key thing: a love of farm toys.

"My grandfather got me started collecting when I was 8 years old, and I would buy whatever the local store carried. It just grew from there," says Trevin, who went to his first farm toy show when he was 11.

Many years later, after collecting thousands of farm toys, Trevin (with help from Beth) now plays a key role in helping others add to their collections. And they say the marketplace is active and doing well.

"I've never really seen farm toy collectors back off, even during the recent recession. When new stuff comes out, people keep buying it," says Trevin, who adds that around 30 percent of their business comes from international orders.

Trevin and Beth, like other dealers, feel good about the state of today's marketplace. "The general consensus amongst other dealers is that we're in a steady market for toys," Beth says.

Who is the typical collector? Trevin says a big share of their customer base is people from rural America who have some type of connection to farming. However, he says there are collectors

of all ages and backgrounds nationwide. What people collect depends on individual preferences, although he has noticed a trend in collectors seeking high-detail and custom-made toys.

"We're one of the biggest 1/64-scale dealers right now, and that's all we sell," Trevin says. "The older stuff is more available in 1/16 scale, while the 1/64 scale offers more variety for collectors. These two sizes are the most popular in the United States, but in Europe the 1/32 scale is big."

In terms of his personal collection, Trevin used to have around 5,000 pieces, but he has scaled it back quite a bit since getting involved with the toy business. He still maintains a sizable collection and says his most prized possessions are the first three tractors he got when he was 8.

"Most of my collection is still in the original packaging, but I used to buy two of everything," he says. "This allowed me to keep one in the package and then take the other out for closer inspection. The best value you're ever going to get is if toys are



Left: Trevin and Beth Greene of Fairfax, Iowa

Right: Detail from a John Deere toy tractor with a harvester attachment.



FARM TOYS

THEY'RE NOT JUST FOR KIDS

By Mark Yontz



A detail view of a McCormick-Deering Farmall F-20 tractor.



This Ford toy tractor has moving parts and lots of fine detail work.



Above: A well-used trio of toy tractors made by the Hubley Manufacturing Company.



Above Right: Real Oliver tractors aren't made anymore, but they're still available as toys.



Right: This Allis-Chalmers tractor features steel wheels.

Below Right: Amanda Schwartz of the National Farm Toy Museum.

still in the package, because once the seal is broken, it's considered opened, which can cut the value in half."

While Trevin and Beth are representative of many collectors and dealers today, there are plenty of other people who follow the farm toy market closely, including Amanda Schwartz, manager and membership coordinator for the National Farm Toy Museum (nationalfarmtoymuseum.com) in Dyersville, Iowa, which has 9,000 items in its collection and draws an average of 20,000 visitors a year.

"Anything people tend to collect, we have examples of it—everything from 1/64 scale up to even some 1/4-scale pieces," Schwartz says. "We even have a large collection of salesman samples, which were used by tractor and implement companies to sell and model their actual equipment."

Even with such a large collection, Schwartz says the museum also has a "wish list," just like any other collector. She is always talking to people and attending shows in search of new items to purchase, borrow, or have donated. The museum also hosts two major toy shows that bring collectors and dealers to Dyersville each year: the Summer Farm Toy Show (June 5-6 this year) and the National Farm Toy Show (Nov. 6-8).

"We've been blessed with donations from the many different toy manufacturers, but we're always on the lookout for older cast-iron toys that were made before the museum was formed," Schwartz says. "But we still purchase toys on occasion, like

the grape harvesting machine and sugar beet harvester we just added to our collection."

Schwartz believes the farm toy market is strong right now, and she especially enjoys seeing the "generational interactions" the museum helps create.

"It's a fun time to be in the hobby," she says. "There's some ebb and flow, just like any hobby, but there are certainly some longtime collectors, as well as a lot of younger people getting involved. So, for anyone interested in collecting, I recommend they attend some shows, ask lots of questions, and absolutely start collecting what they love!" ♦

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