

Seeing in the dark— sort of

Every few years, I like to attend the Farm Show— just to keep up with what's what in the technical side of the world of agriculture.

I find that way I can actually carry on a semi-intelligent conversation with the big boys who actually play in that arena.

I'm an equipment junkie, a trait I inherited from my dad. He loved working with good farm equipment, and I find have his genes in that area, carrying on that Brown family tradition.

Mind you, attending the show is simply a spectator sport for me. The costs of owning and operating those elaborate tractors or equipment (many in the six-figure-plus price range) are beyond the upper echelons of the reality of my financial world.

But I tell ya, I can still look. And dream.

Unlike shows I attended as a kid, today's are more technical. That suits me fine, as the little guys (like me) can oogle the new techy stuff that was once reserved only for the big boys.

One item that caught my eye was the aftermarket GPS (Global Positioning Satellite) units. When introduced years ago, GPS units for farm equipment were only a dream for those farming on a small scale. They simply weren't available in the smaller lines of equipment.

But just as GPS units are becoming more common in vehicles on the road today, the same technology is out there for small farm tractors.

A bolt-on aftermarket unit costs about \$1,500, giving a 30-year-old tractor the same ability to sort of 'see' in the dark, or measure an odd-shaped field, just like today's high-priced modern counterparts.

One night this week, I was struck with how valuable a GPS could be. It was dark and storming as I fired up the tractor to clear the lane so The Sidekick could get home. Even with the quartz halogen lights on the tractor searing into the clouds of snow, it was difficult to see as I headed out to open up the lane.

The snow circled the tractor in whiteout conditions and I had no idea where I was on the driveway. More than once, I had to stop the tractor to stick my head out the window to get my bearings. The last thing I wanted to do was blindly pull out of the laneway onto the road in

front of an oncoming car.

At that moment, it occurred to me how a GPS could guide me in the dark of the night, swirling snow or not, right through the narrowest part of the lane (and not drive off the edge), or out to the road, telling me exactly where I was driving, by means of a small lighted display inside the tractor cab.

When they first became available a few years ago, many farmers equipped their huge tractors and combines with a GPS unit to calculate field acreages and check crop yields.

Today, they do even more. An operator can 'mark' a stone jutting out of a field with the unit, and then the following year the GPS will 'steer' the tractor around it so it doesn't hit it. Another cool thing— they can guide the tractor to make an absolutely perfectly straight pass down the field.

Recently, they've developed another use for the GPS— spraying weeds or insects in the fields at night. The unit simply knows where to 'drive' the tractor so it matches perfectly with the last pass, and the operator doesn't even need to see where he's driving. And there is less wind at night, so the spray doesn't drift as much either.

Seriously, I don't see myself coughing up \$1,500 to mount one on my old tractor, but as time goes on, prices will drop, so who knows?

But most importantly, every time I head out to do battle with Old Man Winter on a stormy night, I get to dream a little.

You see, with a GPS mounted on the old tractor, I'd be certain of one thing: I'd have the straightest damn driveway on the entire concession.

(Ted Brown can be reached at tbrown@independentfreepress.com)



Ted Brown

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Risk of overheating causing fire

Important safety warning for owners of air exchange systems
Please read carefully and completely

Venmar Ventilation has received several reports of major home fires where the suspected cause is a heat recovery system. Burlington fire officials determined that two fires in Burlington have been attributed to Venmar units. However, Venmar's own investigation of these incidents and their causes is not yet completed.

It has come to Venmar's attention that an unlikely series of circumstances could lead to a motor overheating in certain models of air exchangers that may result in a potential fire hazard. Therefore, Venmar Ventilation is continuing its efforts to contact the owners of affected heat recovery systems that can pose a potential fire hazard.

This Safety Upgrade Program covers models manufactured between 1991 and 2001 and between October 2006 and August 2007. Below is a listing of affected units.

Brand	Model number
Venmar	AEXX, EARC, 1XX, 30X, 40X, 4XXXX
Venmar AVS	1.X, 2.X, 30XX, 55XX, 4XXXX, 4XXXXX, 16016XX, C32042
Flair	30, 30XX, 55, 55XX, 85115
vänEE	10, 1XX, 100X, 20, 20XX, 30XX, 90, 4XXXX, 16016XX
Sears	OPTIMUM
Guardian by Broan	100X, 200X, ERVXXXXX, HRVXXXX
NuTone	NUTR130
Conformax	300, 350, 400
Payne	VXXXXXXXXXX
Day & Night	VXXXXXXXXXX
Carrier	ERVXXXXXXXX, HRVXXXXXXXX, VXXXXXXXXXX
Bryant	ERVXXXXXXXX, HRVXXXXXXXX, VXXXXXXXXXX
Heil	HEILXXXXX
York	5263554XXXX
Rheem	84-ERV100, 84-ERV200, 84-HRV100, 84-HRV200
Ruud	84-ERV100, 84-ERV200, 84-HRV100, 84-HRV200
Protech	84-ERV100, 84-ERV200, 84-HRV100, 84-HRV200
Weatherking	84-ERV100, 84-ERV200, 84-HRV100, 84-HRV200

NOTE: The « X » digit used in the model numbers can be either a letter or a number. This model number is located on a silver or a black label positioned on the outside panel of the unit.

Owners of air exchange systems that are covered by this program must immediately **turn their unit off and unplug it**, and contact Venmar as soon as possible by:

- visiting our website at www.venmar.ca
- phone at 1-866-441-4645, or
- mail at SUP, 550 Lemire Blvd, Drummondville, Quebec, Canada, J2C 7W9.

Venmar Ventilation is taking these measures to ensure that all of its customers have total peace of mind regarding their product safety.