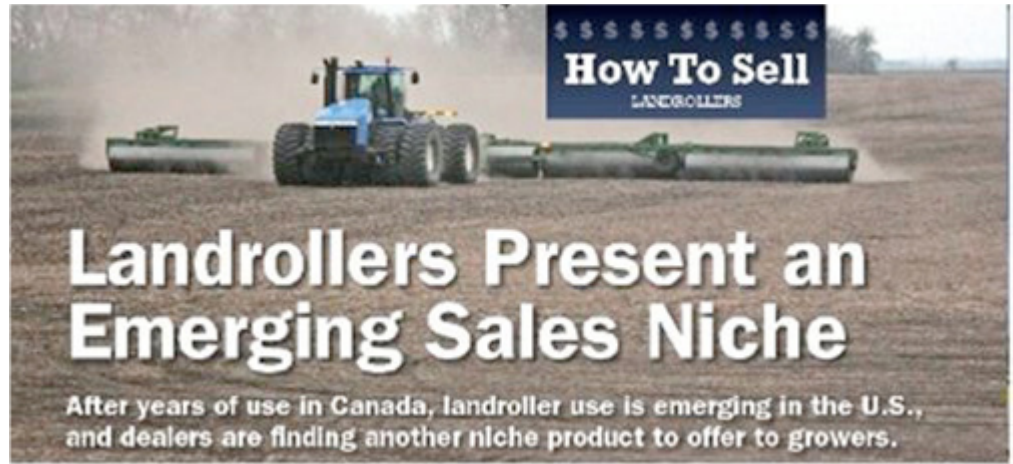


Landrollers have been used by pulsecrop farmers for decades. Rollers provide a smooth and level surface for improved seed-to-soil contact, better weed control, reduced moisture loss, and faster, easier harvesting for shortstature crops like peas and lentils.

Today, these tools have found a variety of new uses across North America, and are quickly gaining popularity among large soybean and corn growers in

the Midwest. As a result, more manufacturers have started offering landrollers to their dealers and customers. Farm Equipment went to some of the most successful dealers in the landroller market today to understand how they are presenting and selling these implements. First and foremost was the need to educate consumers about the product — why it's beneficial, and how it can be used to boost farm productivity.



Landrollers 101

A softball-sized rock ingested into a combine can destroy a halfmillion dollar investment in an instant. Because landrollers press rocks into the ground, they're a good bet for securing a faster and safer harvest — and avoiding the risk of rock ingestion and subsequent damage to farm machinery.

“In areas like ours that have rocks, landrollers offer excellent rock protection,” notes John Deitering, who co-owns Deitering Bros., a dealership in Bancroft, Iowa. “Harvesters will not take a rock into a combine on land that was rolled.”



John Nelson, who owns Schlauderaff Implement Co. in Litchfield, Minn., agrees that the most important selling point is the landroller's ability to mitigate the risks associated with rock ingestion. Rollers also allow cutterbars to get closer to the base of plants, reducing yield losses and sickle section breakage.

Landrollers' 4-Step Sales Process

The dealers Farm Equipment interviewed agree there is an opportunity to get in on the ground-floor of this emerging market, especially in soybean and corn

growing regions. To ensure their successful entry into markets where landrollers were once new, dealers shared the step-by-step approach they adopted that involved strong dealer and customer participation throughout the entire sales process:

Step 1: Educate. Especially in the U.S., many farmers are just beginning to understand the benefits of using landrollers. But the dealer's understanding comes first. Be ready to share your in-depth understanding of the products, and explain how landrollers benefit the farmers in your area.

Step 2: Demo. Prospects need to see the landrollers working in the fields. In addition to the usual in-field demonstrations, the use of test strips in local fields is recommended so customers can see first-hand how landrolling compares with standard farm practices. This way, customers can judge the effects, and the results can be dramatic.

Step 3: Rent 'Em. It should come as no surprise that the top dealer in the U.S. is also a major rental house. As with any emerging technology, farmers want to try it out before they buy it. And not just for a day or two, but for an entire season. This means a commitment to rental — a key factor in sales. Even dealers who don't rent acknowledged that rentals are a key driver in creating demand for the product.

Step 4: Do the Math. A roller should be able to handle at least 3,000 acres each year, and improve soybean yields by roughly 1.5 bushels per acre. That's 4,500 bushels of soybeans. If beans are selling for \$9 per bushel, that's \$40,000 in additional revenue — enough to justify the purchase of a roller in one year. Also place a factor on combine maintenance, and the ability to harvest at a higher ground speed, and it's easy to see how rolling can pay big dividends for your customers.

Nelson recalls a friend who runs eight combines. "He was charging \$2 more per acre for fields that hadn't been rolled, because when you're running on the dirt, you get a higher wear factor and must go at lower speeds. With a rolled field, there's less chance of damage to the combine. Now, he just refuses a field that isn't rolled." Besides rocks, landrollers bury crop residue into the ground, making fields easier to plant in the spring. When it's dry, farmers can roll their fields after planting so that moisture will migrate right up to the plant for better emergence. And because rollers leave a smoother surface in the fields, subsequent passes require less fuel and less horsepower per foot for any given task.

That's not to say growers won't need some convincing. Rolling means yet another pass through the fields, and landrollers are expensive (prices start around \$30,000 in the 40-foot range). But even a grower with 1,000 acres of beans can justify the cost, and in many instances farmers are sharing the equipment or renting themselves. When customers consider the many selling points — greater efficiencies overall, better seeding rates, less fuel and downtime — landrollers add up to higher yields for farmers.

Following is what several top-performing equipment dealers say about how they've established and grown their landroller equipment sales.

Schlauderaff Implement

Schlauderaff Implement Co. was an early adopter of landrollers in the U.S. The dealership began selling to customers that grow seed beans. "Because buyers won't accept the seed beans if they're stained or dirty, the rollers were used in cutting beans to eliminate the dirt stains, and in trying to raise a better quality seed bean," explains Nelson. "That's what first got me intrigued."

Several unanticipated benefits came later. "Corn growers were able to cut down on corn residue in the fall, dropping the stubble height while doing a great job of combining," says Nelson. "The rollers made harvesting a lot easier. It got rid of all rocks and root balls, so the worry about taking dirt into the combine and rock damage disappeared."

Despite these early results, some growers were apprehensive. "Everybody was worried about compaction and erosion," says Nelson. "So far, we think rollers are effective at managing wind erosion. And as far as water erosion is concerned, you've gotten rid of your wheel tracks, and you get less erosion on a contoured field."

These days, most soybean growers in the area roll their fields at some point during the growing cycle. "Now everybody rolls their beans just before they start coming up, so that the moisture migrates up to the plant for better emergence. We've seen claims of 3-5 more bushels per acre," says Nelson. "You will get all the beans that you raise with rollers, because you eliminate yield losses."

Area alfalfa growers have also been experimenting with landrollers. "After the fertilizer, they turned around and rolled the ground lightly and saw tremendous emergence with alfalfa, which just likes being near the surface and firmed up," according to Nelson.

"This is the only part of the country where we're seeing this done. If you're cutting alfalfa and the fields aren't firmed up, you'll have trouble. But if you roll the fields, you'll have a firm seedbed. It's like cutting a second-year crop."

To overcome farmers' concerns, Nelson advises dealers to lay test strips. "When people come back the next year, they'll want to own a roller. There's less trash and dirt. When we roll, it makes combining so much easier and cleaner."

Ten years of experimentation has paid off for Schlauderaff as the dealership sells up to 20 landrollers a year. He too finds growers trading in their for larger, more efficient models. He even has a few used rollers on its lot. “We can talk about the benefits, but when customers see the benefits for themselves, the rollers sell themselves,” says Nelson. “It’s an expensive machine, but when you run the numbers, it’s easy to see that you’ve made money.”

Deitering Bros.

Deitering Bros., a New Holland dealership in Bancroft, Iowa. “In our area, the benefits are rock protection, a faster harvest and, because of the smoother surface, the machine uses less horsepower and fuel,” says Deitering. “Plus, you end up with a cleaner harvest, a cleaner grain tank sample, no corn roots and additional yield per acre. People are always surprised at how much easier it makes the harvest.”

Deitering is quick to point out that the success of the landroller for any dealership depends in large part on regional tillage practices.

“The rougher the tillage practices, the more benefits you’ll see,” he says. “If you have smooth tillage, then it’s an arguable point.”

Landrollers were almost unheard of in north central Iowa until recently, according to Deitering. “About 4 years ago, I was setting up a combine for a customer whose tillage practices were so rough we were leaving 5-8 bushels of beans on the ground. That’s when it clicked for me that a landroller could save this farmer some money. So it was a real, in-field experience that got me started.”

Deitering Bros. started out conservatively — mainly with rentals — and found it could not meet the demand for rentals or sales because demand came so late. “The farmer doesn’t buy these ahead of time. Then, all of a sudden, he wants to buy or rent,” notes Deitering. “We cannot pre-sell many, and product availability has been an issue every spring.”

In fact, the dealership’s conservative sales approach has mirrored the “wait-and-see” approach of area farmers. “Five years ago, we didn’t sell any, we were just renting. Four years ago, we sold 2-3 at most. This year, I’ve sold 8-10 units already.”

Today, the product has found a niche in Deitering’s market with large soybeans growers. “One customer told me that he picked up 1 mile an hour during harvest because the ground was that much smoother,” according to Deitering. “And with test strips, we’ve seen a 1-2 bushel per acre positive benefit because the ground is smoother, and the cutter bar gets more beans into the combine. You won’t cut that bottom pod off because it’s below ground level.” Deitering explains that for some growers, the benefits have been less clear cut. “It has to do with tillage practices in our area,” he says. “Ours is a colder, wetter climate, so we battle too wet more often than too dry.”



There’s been some worry about wind and water erosion. And while the area has seen more acres rolled within the last few years, it hasn’t seen those 5-inch rainfalls during the same period. It has seen high winds, however, and wind erosion concerns from blowing corn leaves are limiting sales. “We’re just starting to roll corn stalks after the harvest, so this is the first time we’re using rollers with corn-on-corn,” says Deitering. “With the corn, it’s such a sturdy stalk and it’s very hard on tires, so you will save on tire wear. But the main hope is that by rolling the corn, we’ll get everything flat so disc rippers can cut better and mix silage with residue better, leaving a blacker profile for a quicker warm-up and dry-up in the spring.”

As with most new products, Deitering is both cautious and curious. “We’ve all seen new products come and go, and there’s always caution in adopting those new products,” he says. “This tool isn’t without questions or wor-

ries, but more are being sold all the time, and the benefits now outweigh the worries. Be prepared to rent, and go at it cautiously in your area if your tillage practices are different. Be just like the customer — seeing is believing.”

Nation’s Top Dealer Shares Sales Advice

Just 5 years ago, Gary Naeve of Custom Made Products in Humboldt, Iowa, had never heard of landrollers. Today his business, which specializes in dirtscrapers, rollers and trucking, is the largest landroller dealer in the U.S. According to Naeve, these are the top “hot buttons” to push to farmers about landrollers:

Controlling Corn Rootballs. “When you rotate corn and soybeans, the root balls rot through the summer, and when they go into the combine, you get all that dirt. Landrollers eliminate that problem.”

No Rocks When You Roll. “Before landrollers, my customers used to carry 10-12 sickle sections for their header to repair damage from rocks. Now they can combine 1,000 acres and never replace a sickle head. That saves downtime.” Trash Talk. “Rolling prevents trash from plugging the combine head. If the ground is wet, the trash plugs up your head so you have to wait, even though the beans are ready. When you roll, it pushes the trash down, so you can combine any time the beans are dry.”

Seeding Corn on Corn. “A lot of farmers roll corn on corn during planting. They’ll get the field ready, roll it and then plant. You get better seed contact and if the corn comes up even, that’s a real plus. Combining corn is easier, too when you roll before you seed.”

Roll Before You Rip. “Some farmers use the roller after the corn harvest in place of chopping stalks. The disc ripper does a better job when the stalks are flat on the ground.”

