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Tire Business Special Feature

Specialty tires

Specialty tires, wheels help Kentucky farmer increase corn yield

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EVANSVILLE, Ind.

When Kentucky farmer Josh Lancaster decided he needed custom wheels and new tires for his two John Deere 8285R tractors, he called Kenny Critser.

Critser is general manager at Ziegler Tires in Evansville. Since opening his store in 2020, it's not unusual from him to travel 100 miles to meet with a farmer and put his 30-plus years of experience in agricultural tires to good use. Approximately 60% of his store's sales are in agricultural and tires for other equipment needed by farmers in parts of Illinois, Indiana and Kentucky.

Lancaster, the owner-operator of Hust Farms in Slaughters, Ky., needed Critser's help with an innovative wheel-and-tire design to improve the yield on his 7,000 acres of corn. He said he believed Critser, whom he's worked with for more than 15 years and calls his "go-to guy," would help him achieve his goal.

"He's who I'm going to call first if it's anything in the tire or track world."

Lancaster wanted his newly designed tractor to travel over four rows of corn at one time instead of the typical two rows. To do this, he wanted only four tires on the front



Kenny Critser is general manager at Ziegler Tires in Evansville.

and back wheels instead of the typical eight. When spraying the crops with liquid nitrogen, four fewer tires would create only two tracks between the rows of corn, significantly limiting the damage to the crops.

"The tractor had to be set at a specific width and then the liquid applicator had to be set at a specific width as well to fit within the row," Critser said.

The project began in June 2023 with Critser working to secure the right tires. Because the tires Lancaster wanted weren't available in every brand, multiple brands were

needed.

For the rear tires, he decided that Trelleborg M1000 Progressive Traction High Power VF 480/95R54 met his needs for load rating and size.

For the front tires, he ordered Michelin Agribib Row Crop 380/85R46 — a preferred brand among many of Critser's customers. And for the two liquid applicators, he ordered four Alliance AgriFlex IF380/105R54 tires designed to carry heavier loads.

By the end of August, all tires had been delivered to Lancaster.

For the wheels, Critser connected Lancaster directly with the product



This part of the design Critser came up with the help crop yield.

and engineering teams for Wold Rim & Wheel, an agricultural wheel manufacturer in Saint Ansgar, Iowa.

For the two tractors, 12 custom-made wheels were needed. But with only four tires on the re-designed tractor, the challenge for Wold was to design stronger wheels to handle the lower weight. The company came up with the following:

- The front tires were set on 46-inch diameter and 12-inch-wide wheels;
- The two rear tires were positioned on 54-inch-diameter, but with 16-inch-wide wheels;

Wheels for the two liquid applicators were also 12 inches wide.

To ensure the tractors could cover four rows of corn, there is 120-inch spacing for the rear wheels and the applicator, double the width of the original tractor.

Critser credits Wold for designing high-quality wheels to fit this specific application.

"This project was out of the norm because of the weight difference," he said. "The further you get away from the machine, the less weight you can carry. It puts more stress on the axles and the adapter plates extend your wheels out. They had to beef up the wheels to carry the weight in the centers."

"This was very specialized work and Wold delivered an outstanding product," Critser said.

The early results of the newly designed tractor are encouraging. Since installing the wheels in early spring, Hust Farms has sprayed more than 1,000 acres of corn. As expected, there is less crop damage, leading to higher yields, as well as better ride quality and safer handling.

"This was probably one of the most specific applications I've had to deal with," Critser said. "Josh (Lancaster) made it simple because he knew exactly what he wanted. I don't ever remember seeing this equipment like this in the past. But it worked and all of us are pretty happy."

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