

David Holthaus

This is Kansas Profile. I'm Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

Let's go to North Carolina. A hunter is watching for deer at a food plot which he planted to attract them. When that food plot was planted, where do you suppose the planter came from? Would you believe, from a farmer halfway across the continent in Kansas? It's today's Kansas Profile.

David Holthaus is the innovative Kansas farmer who specializes in building planters for small-scale, specialty production as well as fertilizer carts. David is a good farmer as well as a good mechanic. He lives on the farm where he grew up near Baileyville.

“My dad and granddad all farmed,” David said. “I’ve always enjoyed it.” He got his first farm in 1994 and built a building which served as both his house and his farm shop. It was nicknamed the “shouse.”

In 1997, he met Teresa. She lived in Topeka but her father grew up on a farm, so she was interested in farming. They married and started a family, moving to his home farm and building up the operation through the years. One thing which his family did annually was to plant a small patch for fresh sweet corn.

By 2003, David was using Ebay, the online system for buying and selling. “I sold a few odds and ends on Ebay,” David said.

The next year, when they tried to plant the sweet corn with a field planter, they found that the large planter didn’t work well in their small plot. When David went to a farm machinery auction, he saw an older John Deere six row planter and wondered if he could alter it to make it work. He remade part of it into a two-row planter. “It worked great!” David said.

Since he was already on Ebay, he decided to build two more planters out of the remaining four rows from the planter and list them online. They sold immediately.

That was the beginning of this remarkable business. Now David buys used field planters and remakes them into two-, three-, and four-row planters which he markets primarily over the Internet. He builds bars, remounts the planter mechanism, replaces bearings and other fixtures as needed, and paints them.

“I was the first to build this type of product and sell it over the Internet,” David said. His innovation didn’t stop there.

David had been using a John Deere knife applicator to apply anhydrous ammonia fertilizer but wanted a tool which would work better in no-till situations. He had also seen a dry fertilizer tank which he particularly liked.

So David decided to marry the two. He built a cart which combined the John Deere 2510H anhydrous bar with the dry fertilizer tank and it worked great. It has the benefit of several practical features which David knows first-hand from using it in the field.

“I like to tinker in the shop and build things,” David said. Speaking of his shop, David had to build a new one in 2010 because his new combine wouldn’t fit in the old one. This new shop includes a state of the art collection system for used oil plus lots of room to store and work on equipment. The shop is one of the most immaculate and well-organized that I have seen. It also has air conditioned office space complete with a restroom door in John Deere green.

David farms about 1,500 acres. He uses downtime in the winter to build these planters and the fertilizer carts in his shop. His work has been featured in No Till Farmer and Kansas Farmer magazines.

David has sold hundreds of his planters to customers as far away as North Carolina and Alabama, and even Malaysia. Wow. That’s pretty impressive for someone near the rural community of Baileyville, which has a population of 181 people. Now, that’s rural.

For more information, go to www.ksfarmsmfg.com.

It's time to leave North Carolina, where a hunter planted his food plot using a planter from rural Kansas. We salute David Holthaus and family for making a difference by finding a way to improve the equipment with which he works. As Kansas Farmer magazine said, he's making good a bit better.

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.