

seven months. In fact, just after the rental show in the middle of the season we ran out of product. We lost some sales, but the Merry Tiller is a labor intensive product, and you can't just build them right away. This year, we've forecast more sales increases, and our demand has been high.

PET: Do you have any future plans for the Merry Tiller line?

We think there's still a lot of opportunity with what we've got now. The sales figures are nowhere near what they were when the product was originally built out of Washington, so we think we can grow the business. There are some competitors that have come in and taken away some of the market, but we feel by proving ourselves year in, year out, we can get that back. I will say the basic unit and its design, no, we don't plan to change it.

We will probably offer some other engine models and maybe some other attachments. The basic Merry Tiller line

will stay the same for now, but you never know. Some people have asked us about a rear tine model, but we're not even thinking about that right now because we think there's a lot of potential in this front tine unit. But it might be a natural some time down the line.

PET: How have the dealers reacted to some of the changes you've made? Are they positive about it?

Of course, the dealers want a product that's going to perform and hold up, so they feel real good about it. The only thing that we did do different this year is change the handles and the tines from being white to black. The white paint was having a hard time covering the steel and it gets dirty easy, so the black really offset that and it looks a lot better.

For dealers, the main thing is that there's definitely a good strong market for a quality front-tine tiller. A lot of the rear-tine tiller companies beat up the front-tines, but we're really not the same as those that are sold at the mass merchants. And if a dealer understands and knows the Merry Tiller, he knows it's a good product and easy to sell even though it's priced considerably higher. So the dealer will have to be educated to know the Merry Tiller system as well as our differences. I know they're being sold and people are happy with them.

Part of our plan when we purchased Merry Tiller was to continue to be a supplier of what we call the "outlying" products to this industry—things that aren't in the mainstream such as lawn-mowers, chain saws or string trimmers. We've been aggressively getting some new accounts, coming out with new products and overall doing pretty well. The ecological movement has certainly

helped things like the chipper/shredders, tillers and even sprayers.

PET: How do you think the environmental movement will affect industry, and how can dealers react?

A lot of people have jumped on the bandwagon, but we think there's a lot more hype than actual substance to this thing. We've been in the business a long time so we have a better feel for it.

But also, in this industry some of the main products are declining so people are looking at other areas to keep their volume up. But until it's a real pocket-book issue, most homeowners aren't going to go out and buy a product they don't necessarily need. Once it's a pocket-book issue, and consumers are going to save money on it, we feel they'll do it. We look at it every day.

I think dealers also have a great opportunity because for this type of product, consumers generally want a little more advice and help. They need to be educated. So if the dealer knows the market and knows why people want some of these ecological products, he can sell a product with a little bit more margin. But they have to know it and understand it.

We try to talk dealers into creating an environmental center in their store. The other thing dealers will have to do is possibly carry products that aren't gasoline-powered.

They might have to have some gardening books and other things that go with a garden. It could be railroad ties or sprinkler systems. I don't want to say garden center, because it's not quite a garden center, but dealers need to get into other products to help build more traffic flow.

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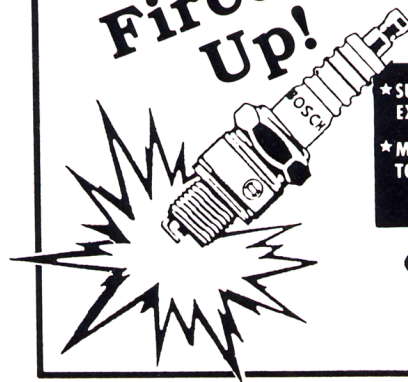
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