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Tractor sales flourish

By ARA Content

Nationwide, increasing numbers of people are migrating from the city in search of more space and a more traditional rural lifestyle. As they move, they're spurring a surprising boom in tractor sales.

It's a trend that John Barber, 41, has noticed firsthand living in rural Wellington, Ohio, 40 miles southwest of Cleveland.

"In the years up until I was 22 or so, there were two new houses built within a three-mile radius of here," he says.

"In that same area there are probably 50 houses now. People are moving out here and buying four or five acres, and they're buying big mowers."

2000 Census data shows that this migration trend is widespread. Many of the counties that experienced the most rapid growth from 2000 to 2004 are distant suburbs of major cities, including the fastest-growing county in the nation, Virginia's Loudoun County, 35 miles west of Washington, D.C.

Companies such as Case IH and New Holland, best-known for their professional-grade farm equipment, have launched expanded "prosumer" tractor lines to cater to the growing ranks of urban emigrants who have property maintenance needs that a conventional riding mower can't fulfill.

Lawn and garden equipment such as Case IH's Farmall and New Holland Boomer Series subcompact and compact tractors are designed not only to mow larger spaces, but accommodate rear-mounted implements like rotary tillers, rotary cutters, front-mounted blades, snow blowers and brooms. They also can be hooked up to a loader to haul firewood or gardening supplies, making them all-purpose vehicles well-suited for maintaining larger tracts of land.

"These are hobby farmer tractors that can last 15 to 20 years -- they're much more heavy-duty than what you'll find in the typical box store," says Larry Krystowski, owner of Krystowski Tractor in Wellington.

"The people we see buying them are children of our customers who are splitting off a five-acre piece of the family farm, or people moving from the big city who've bought a five- or ten-acre parcel and want to get their hands dirty."

To make these better-quality tractors more attainable for the growing consumer market, CNH Capital, the financial services business behind Case IH and New Holland, is marketing the Freedom Account, a line of credit for consumers' use at participating Case IH and New Holland equipment dealers. The Freedom Account is issued by CIT Bank.

As they invest in higher-end equipment, many former city dwellers are finding themselves making an investment in something else as well: a new simpler way of life far from the hustle and bustle of the city. But they haven't rejected their consumer impulses in the process -- something evident in the tractors they're buying.