

## Production

# From farm shop to the marketplace

Scott Campbell's labour-saving idea for spreading out straw has turned into a sizeable business

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Stratford - When Scott Campbell talks about the design process behind his Rotary Fork he can hardly get the words out fast enough.

It reflects in some ways the speed of market acceptance for the machine he invented for spreading straw in chicken barns on his Stratford-area farm.

In September of 2010 - when a story about the Rotary Fork appeared in *Ontario Farmer* - he offered the first one for sale. A year later he has sold 50 of them to farmers across Canada and most recently the first one into the United States.

Like many machines invented in farm workshops by farmers,



Scott Campbell shows two models of his Rotary Fork that can be mounted on graden or full-sized tractors

Campbell, 38, was looking for a mechanical means of reducing an onerous farm chore - spreading straw over the thousands of square feet in his two broiler barns.

Originally Campbell created a push-type machine with a five-horsepower motor for spreading straw. It was an improvement but it still seemed

like a lot of work to him.

Eventually he created a prototype which was attached to the front of a lawn tractor and proved effective in not only reducing labour but eliminating the need for a custom straw chopper and the labour required to spread straw. It was powered by an auxiliary hydraulic pump on the tractor.

THE TIMING, essential to the success of so many start-up businesses, was on Campbell's side.

A cost-share program put in place by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) under its "Growing Forward" initiative, pays 50 per cent toward measures taken to implement biosecurity in poultry operations.

Eliminating the need for custom operators and/or hired help needed to spread straw coming on to the farm with potential for introducing disease qualifies his Rotary Fork for funding, said Campbell.

The first Rotary Fork was 5'8" wide and sold for \$3,500 - the amount Campbell calculated a farmer could spend without first having to consult with his wife.

But like most farm equipment, the request for larger models eventually surfaced. As a result Campbell had developed a 9'8" model for mounting on the front of loader tractors, selling for \$5,700.

ALTHOUGH THE Rotary Fork has been on the market for approximately a year, the thinking process behind it had actually started in 2004 when a leg injury prevented Campbell from spreading straw and he had to watch his parents do the job.

Trained as a mechanical engineer and familiar with numerous machine and fabrication shops in nearby Stratford, Campbell established a simple process. Parts required were fabricated by local business to his specifications with painting and assembly done at his farm shop.

Campbell initiated sales by offering to spread straw for free in chicken barns with his prototype. It was recently retired, still in good shape, after covering 1.8 million square feet of barn floor with straw.

He takes a bale of his own straw to demonstrate the preference for finely chopped straw, encouraging farm owners to acquire similar straw from custom baling operators when hiring that job done.

Comparing the earlier Rotary Fork to the most current models, Campbell noted there are 30 per cent fewer parts in the latest models. Design, which allows the machines to fit on any make or model of tractor or skid steer, has been simplified with fewer parts creating less chance for a mechanical breakdown.

He now assembles the machines in batches of 20 and markets them under the catch phrase - "One person, any tractor." They spread both straw and shavings, utilizing a series of baler pick up tines arranged in a helix pattern around a rotating drum, to any depth desired.

Campbell has been quite surprised by the interest from distributors in the machine. Recently he pulled a trailer with his pickup truck all the way to British Columbia to deliver five of the Rotary Forks to a distributor.

"I don't know if I would order five machines sight unseen from a wonky guy five provinces away," said Campbell.

However, he is confident the eventual purchasers will be satisfied with the performance.

Although he has constantly been tinkering with both ways to improve production and design of the machine, the final design was settled on this past January. He can now concentrate on production.

"It is shocking how fast this has grown," said Campbell of the business. It has also involved his wife Jessica, a graphic designer. She has created promotional material and helped design a website, [www.RotaryFork.com](http://www.RotaryFork.com).

Campbell said he is not too concerned about another manufacturer either trying to build a similar product or wanting to buy him out.

"I am really a designer and I would just move on and design something else," he said.

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