Harvesting the Farm



Last year was a roller coaster year for America's farmers. A devastating drought crippled farmers in the South and Southeast while torrential rains and floods ruined many crops in the Midwest. And while many agricultural forecasters say that farmers' overall incomes should be slightly higher in 1987 than in past years, the natural and economic problems that affected many farmers throughout 1986 will likely offset any actual or predicted gains in income. And that means that farmers will once again be making repairs to existing equipment, making do with what they have instead of purchasing new equipment.

Farmers are, and are going to have to continue to be, very selective about where and how they spend their money. Therefore, they are looking for a parts supplier who can give them the best value for their money, supply parts which prevent downtime and provide the kind of service which closely matches their special needs. Service that includes delivery of parts when the farmer needs them, advice on the types available and/or how to repair a piece of equipment, convenient store hours and machine shop service.

Also, just as automotive parts and components are becoming extremely complex, so too are tractors and other farm implement equipment. And while farmers will still be able to make some repairs, they will not be able to do all of their maintenance and repair because of the increasing complexity of parts.

However, you and other NAPA AUTO PARTS stores can provide farmers with the necessary information on D-I-Y repairs as well as recommend who, in your area, can do the more complex repairs. And selling to farmers will be easier if you let those in your area know about how you can assist them. Farmers don't really require a hard-sell. Most already know about NAPA's quality automotive parts. But they may not be fully aware of NAPA's farm coverage.

Learn to talk farmer's language and how they operate as well as some of the problems they are facing. Utilize a retired farmer as a part-time outside salesperson. A retired farmer already understands the language and knows the best times to approach farmers (your best times would be before the planting season and before the harvest season).

In addition to a retired farmer, your local farm extension agent, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and your local newspaper's farm news section or farm classifieds are all excellent sources to learn about the farmer's operation and problems facing him. Other informative sources include farm magazines (such as *Progressive Farmer* or *Successful Farming*), local trade or business associations, local colleges with agricultural departments and 4-H clubs.

Once you or your salesperson has learned something about a farmer's method of operation, you need to get your foot in the door of his place of business — his farm. Gerace Auto Parts, in Napoleonville, LA (serviced by NAPA New Orleans) is located in one of Louisiana's largest agricultural areas. Russell Gerace is an outside salesman for this NAPA AUTO PARTS store and specializes in farm accounts. Gerace has developed a method of calling on accounts that has proven successful for over ten years.

Gerace does a "cold call" on new accounts and tells them a little bit about NAPA's programs. He then asks if he can come back to do a survey of that farmer's equipment. If the farmer agrees, Gerace comes back and does the survey. He then takes that opportunity to give a more detailed explanation of NAPA's farm coverage.

A good survey, such as that utilized by Gerace Auto Parts, will let you highlight the particular parts that are on a farmer's machinery and let you base your inventory on his needs. You'll then offer the farmer a time-saving advantage of being his single source for many different makes of farm equipment. And that's something that is not offered by tool and farm implement dealers.

Surveys are also a good door opener to use when approaching farm accounts. Other door opener ideas include participation at state, county or local fairs or sponsoring your own farm night at your store.

Participation at fairs can range from sponsorship of an event or ride to having a booth set up. The Indianapolis, Fort Wayne and Mt. Vernon Distribution Centers joined together to host NAPA Farm Day at a past Indiana State Fair. Through the extensive use of the NAPA logo and name on billboards, programs and shuttle buses, as well as sponsoring a hot air balloon race and using NAPA representatives to present awards, these Distribution Centers helped the NAPA AUTO PARTS stores they service make inroads with Indiana area farmers.

Farm Nights are another great door opener idea. You can hold the Farm Night at your store, town meeting hall or other suitable location. Quite a number of NAPA AUTO PARTS stores have used Farm Nights and have had great success. One of the more successful Farm Nights was sponsored this past year by Marshalltown Auto Parts in Marshalltown, IO (serviced by NAPA Des Moines).

Because Marshalltown is located in a rural area of Iowa, their primary customers are farmers. Buck Hepler, owner of Marshalltown Auto Parts, didn't want all farmers in the area to attend his Farm Night. He invited only the best of his loyal farm accounts as well as potential accounts. And he was very successful with the event. Over 40% of those accounts invited attended