



MFD Tractors in East Texas

“MFD” or “mechanical front drive”, often referred to as “four-wheel-drive” is a popular option on many new tractors. It wasn’t that long ago that MFD tractors were quite a rarity in east Texas, but things have certainly changed. Today, MFD tractors are extremely common, and in some areas outnumber two-wheel-drives (hereafter referred to as 2wd). Why is this, you ask?

The obvious benefit of MFD is better traction. Instead of having just the rear wheels pulling, you’ve got the front wheels pulling too, so you’re increasing your traction by a great deal with MFD. Oftentimes, people tend to make the mistake of thinking of an MFD tractor as solely designed to slog through muddy and wet ground day in and day out, to keep the tractor from getting stuck. Nothing could be further from the truth. Indeed, with all things being equal, an MFD tractor will likely go places that a 2wd will not. However, the general rule of thumb I like to use is “don’t go anywhere on an MFD tractor that you wouldn’t go on a 2wd tractor”. This will keep you out of trouble, and help prevent you from getting too brazen and heading off into places that you could easily get stuck in.

The real benefit of the added traction MFD provides is in any situation where you engage the ground. For example, if you want to pull a disk with your tractor, you’ll find you can handle a larger sized disk with an MFD tractor. In some cases, it’s possible for a 50 hp MFD tractor to outpull a 90 hp 2wd tractor. When you’re hooked up to something that’s actually working against the tractor, trying to keep it from moving forward, you’ll typically lose traction first – not run out of horsepower. This is what makes MFD such a necessity for plowing, and explains why when you get up into the Midwest area of the U.S., you’ll see almost exclusively MFD tractors on large farms. MFD will make tractors with a front loader much more efficient. Rather than slipping the rear tires as you begin to load the bucket with material, all four tires will work together to “bulldog” the tractor up into the pile. This saves you time, fuel, and tire wear, not to mention the added safety you get when you’re not slipping and sliding trying to get a full bucket of material.

A common misconception of MFD is that it somehow increases the horsepower of the tractor. This is not true, since the engine puts out only a certain amount of power that cannot be increased by the addition of a powered front axle. But for the above mentioned reasons, it is possible for a smaller “physical sized” tractor to outperform a larger “physical sized” tractor when doing ground-engaging work with your tractor.

There are other benefits to MFD as well. Usually, you’ll get a slightly better ride, with all things being equal. The characteristic large, lugged front tires on MFD tractors tend to smooth out the ride in a rough field compared to the smaller tires on a 2wd tractor. MFD gives a tractor better braking ability, especially when towing heavy loads.

This can be especially important if you use the tractor for transporting large loads of hay down public roadways.

MFD makes me think of the old expression, “work smarter, not harder”. It increases the efficiency of your tractor and can improve the profitability of your operation. You can finish chores faster, safer, and burn less fuel in the process. Of course, everything comes at a price. The initial cost of MFD on a new tractor is typically around 10-15% higher than a 2wd. However, when you consider the value you add to your operation with an MFD tractor, it is usually worth the cost. You’ll be rewarded when the time comes to replace the tractor, since the added cost of MFD is usually recaptured upon resale.

-Greg Beaver