



## The Value of a Front Loader

The most popular attachment for a farm tractor in our area, by far, is the front loader. A loader can be installed on nearly any tractor without much trouble. It can expand the range of work your tractor can do a great deal, making it much more useful. I can't tell you how many times I've heard ranchers say they wouldn't own a tractor without a loader. Typically, on newer installations, a "joystick" lever is used to control the up and down movement of the loader, and the rollback and dump of the attachment.

There are various attachments you can put on a loader, the most popular of which is a bucket. The bucket allows you to scoop and dig material and move it from one place to another. It can also be used to level an uneven grade or backfill an excavation. Another popular attachment is the hay spear, used for moving hay, and also handy for various other uses such as sticking and hauling off a dead cow (warning-hold your breath if you attempt this!). Other popular attachments include pallet forks, grapples, and brush rakes.

You may be thinking it must be quite a chore to switch between all these different loader attachments. In the past, you'd have been right, as most loaders used to have four pins that had to be knocked out with a hammer if you wanted to switch from one attachment to another. As time went on, different manufacturers created their own unique "quick attach" systems, allowing a user to make a quick transition between attachments, usually by pulling two spring-loaded pins, or by operating a lever. This was great, but it was still sometimes a pain to deal with, since each manufacturer had their own style of quick attach. Over the last ten years, we have seen a transition by most manufacturers to the "skid steer style" quick attach coupler. This has been a welcomed change, since we no longer have to be concerned with so many different styles of couplers. An added benefit for the user is that he can borrow his neighbor's attachments as long as they have the skid steer style coupler.

A few years ago, a customer called in and thought he had broken his loader valve. He had moved his joystick upwards to lower his bucket and the joystick stuck in the up position. We went out and found that he had simply locked it into the "float" position. There's a lot of misconceptions about what the float position is, and what it's used for. When you lower the loader to the ground, it is under downward hydraulic pressure. This is great if you want to dig a hole, or otherwise apply pressure to the ground with your bucket. However, sometimes you just want the weight of the loader and bucket on the ground-without added downforce. An example of this is if you were trying to level some ground with your loader. Without float, you would apply full downforce to the loader bucket, causing it to dig into the ground. With float, the bucket would "ride" on the ground, allowing you to precisely control just how much material you remove from the surface. On most modern loaders, float position is obtained by moving the joystick to the

fully upward position. You will feel it lock into float, and when you want to release it, just give it a firm yank.

I think one of the best kept secrets about newer loaders – even though it’s really no secret at all – is their ability to be completely removed from the tractor when not needed. Imagine if you needed to mow a 100 acre pasture, and you knew you wouldn’t need the loader. Rather than having to look around the loader, or worse yet, raise it up to an unsafe height, you could simply “park” the entire loader - boom, bucket, and all - and back right out from under it. Most quality loaders produced in the past twenty-or-so-years are easily removable. There’s usually a couple of parking stands to deploy that are stored somewhere on the loader, and the loader will be lowered until it just lifts the front tires off the ground. At this point there us usually a boss-type pin to remove at the base of the loader-these are usually removable without tools. Then, you simply curl the bucket back, and the loader magically lifts up off of its frame. Lastly, you just unplug the quick-couplers on your loader hoses, and just back out from under the loader – voila! Just be sure to have a firm, level surface to detach the loader on, to make hooking back up easier.

–Greg Beaver

