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The Fresno Bee

CENTRAL CALIFORNIA'S LEADING NEWSPAPER FOR 77 YEARS



Excerpt from The Fresno Bee

Tech steers tractors of future

**Global positioning system
lets farmers use their
machinery at night.**

By Robert Rodriguez

The Fresno Bee

"**Tulare** - Imagine jumping into your tractor, fiddling with a few knobs and throwing it into autopilot.

It's possible and it's happening.

Straight as an arrow, the tractor is guided precisely down each row using satellite technology known as GPS, or global positioning system.

This newest high-tech tool wowed many attending the annual California Farm Equipment Show and International Exposition.

"We have been waiting for something like this for years," said Terry Button, an Arizona row-crop farmer. "It has the potential to reduce your costs and eliminate the need for highly skilled operators. You just turn it on and it goes."

Not only does the technology automatically steer the tractor, it allows the machine to be used at night for bed preparation, cultivating or planting. Farmers can save time while reducing production costs. By building precise rows, farmers maximize yields.

The Technology, which can be used with most tractors, also alerts the operator when it nears the end of a row, to avoid the possibility of an accident.

Button's only hesitation was the price tag. The sophisticated equipment costs a minimum of about \$40,000. And that's per tractor.

"I hope, just like with computers, the price will start going down," Button said "But we are definitely interested."

...Company officials at the Menlo Park-based IntegriNautics (www.IntegriNautics.com) have been working on its system for the last three years. The Stanford University graduates started out by developing landing systems for airlines. They branched out into agriculture after realizing the potential for saving farmers time and money.

Michael O'Connor, the 29-year-old director of IntegriNautics' Autofarm Systems, says that as a graduate student he shared his research with Robert Mailler and competitor Trimble Navigation Limited.

"It occurred to me at the time how much value this could have in agriculture, but I was in student mode," O'Connor said. "I have learned since then. Now, I think we can run fast with what we have developed."

IntegriNautics manufactured an initial dozen units and has sold all but three. The first units sold at \$38,500 apiece...."