

FEEL THE MAGNETISM

Progressive Ag lives up to its name with a continual drive to improve its LectroBlast orchard sprayers

Eroy De Winkle remembers the day when he and a fellow business partner brainstormed a rather brilliant idea to build an electrostatic orchard sprayer.

“It all started on a shoestring — basically two guys working out of the back of their pickups, hiring shops to build sprayers that we could go out and sell,” recalls De Winkle. “We ended up designing a new spraying system with a patent on it. We really didn’t have a vision of the size that we would one day attain.”

That was the start of Progressive Ag in Modesto, California, and the eventual

development of the LectroBlast. Bringing chemistry and physics to the orchard, this innovative sprayer features a patented technology that exposes atomized spray to electrostatic electrodes. The charged fog blows into the tree canopy and the swirling electrically charged droplets magnetically cling to leaf surfaces, uniformly coating the front and backsides of the foliage.

“We named our company Progressive Ag for a reason,” recalls De Winkle. “We wanted to be ahead of the curve. Electrostatic orchard spraying was an area that we felt had many opportunities.”

De Winkle says while many growers seemed skeptical of the science at first, a growing number soon began seeing the benefits of more precise and complete delivery of spray — less chemical drift and the ability to move down the orchard row at faster ground speeds.

The LectroBlast sprayer also began reaching new heights in canopy coverage. “One of the biggest challenges is blowing spray into the tops of walnut trees,” De Winkle explains. “When we went to Tier 3 engines, we did a complete redesign of the sprayer and introduced a new fan design with

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A John Deere engine powers a high-speed centrifugal fan and water pump on the LectroBlast 2650 sprayer.



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LectroBlast sprayers are assembled at Progressive Ag in Modesto, California.



four air outlets on the back instead of two. We were able to greatly increase the productivity and height we could reach.”

Today, Progressive Ag is still as progressive as ever. “We’re always trying to improve what we’re doing,” says De Winkle. “Sometimes we’ve been criticized because we make changes when we see there’s room for improvement. If we see a place for improvement, we generally incorporate that improvement into our next production run.”

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— Elroy De Winkle, Progressive Ag

One thing that hasn’t changed is a strong preference for John Deere power. John Deere PowerTech™ engines have been

the standard offering on its diesel-powered sprayers for more than two decades, says Mark Ryckman, sales manager and co-owner of Progressive Ag. “I have a lot of customers out there who will only drive green. They only have green tractors, and they like having the ‘green’ engine in our machine.”

The John Deere PowerTech PWL 4.5L Final Tier 4/Stage IV engine has the power range to drive high-velocity fans on four LectroBlast models. An 86-kW (115-hp) engine powers the 2450 and 2460 sprayers, while a 104-kW (140-hp) model drives a higher-capacity centrifugal fan on the 2650 and 2660 sprayers.

Over the years, the company has successfully progressed through each regulatory emissions tier with John Deere engines with the help of their John Deere engine distributor. “Western Power has been very helpful with educating us on the CARB (California Air Resource Board) regulations, as well as other emissions regulations around the world, and where they are headed in the future,” explains

Ryckman. “They put a complete package together for us that makes it very simple for us to just drop the engine directly into our machines.”

Progressive Ag launched its first LectroBlast with a John Deere PowerTech PWL 4.5L Final Tier 4/Stage IV engine. “Western Power and John Deere are very supportive in getting us the information we need to be able to run the new Final Tier 4 engines,” says Ryckman.

LectroBlast sprayers are sold through the global network of John Deere agricultural dealers, and Ryckman likes knowing authorized John Deere dealers can offer expertise and technical support to customers. “Because of the service we’ve received from John Deere, Western Power, and its dealers, I would recommend that everybody run a John Deere engine in their machines.”

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