

Ag's White Truck

By Heidi Herrmann

The presence of a white truck in the agricultural landscape is virtually a given. Across the nation there is this repeated phenomenon. I, for one, have worked in various echelons of agriculture (ag), from research to governmental to management to field hand. At all these stages there was the obligatory white truck on the scene. I've seen them creep into the field from afar, I've driven them, and I've gotten rides in them. They seem to equate the driver with some sort of leadership position. They are definitely noticeable from some distance; the white metal is a stark contrast from the browns and greens of the natural landscape. Invokes: "Oh, here he comes" in the minds of the field hands. To his industry peers he is recognized as a man with a purpose and responsibility on the job; he's been trusted with the company vehicle and he's keeping it clean. For example, I took an informal survey in Salinas, CA as to who drives these things. A non-biased discovery was that white, young (25-40), clean-cut males were the predominant possessors. What gives?! White guy = white truck? There was that 3% though, of Latino or women that drove them. Perhaps these are folks who had worked their way up the ladder to crew manager and were given 'loftier' responsibilities. Also worth noting as a young woman driving a white truck in Salinas at the time, I got many surprised (or was that flirtatious?) looks from men. "There is somebody different from us on the scene," "What's she doing?" "Who's she working for?"... were some interpreted comments.

Why Trucks? Trucks are the old standard for 'farmers'. Are the people that drive these things truly farmers though? Generally, they are at least in the agriculture industry if they roam into the fields. But rarely do the drivers plant the crop or do the actual hands-on farming. These white trucks belong to the 'management' or related echelon, i.e. PCA, researcher/extension agent, fertilizer salesman, etc. Field and crew managers generally get issued one of these icons if working for a larger establishment, or purchase them on their own accord. Team unity through identical company vehicles is good in theory -creates uniformity, homogeneity and professionalism. These are the guys that drive from site to site hurriedly, hopping out now and again to chat with one of the crew members, relay messages, or unload/pick-up supplies. Drivers are often labeled with the term "tan-left-arm managers." You've seen these guys – their arm resting out the driver window, busily puttering about, multi-tasking, eating, conducting business from their mobile office on the front seat all while perusing dirt, ranch roads. They have work clothes on, but are unsoiled. Trucks are designed to carry a cargo in the bed, but given today's common farm-sized acreage, this little 5'x6' just won't suffice, so it usually goes empty. Hence, it's utility is diminished. The truck is not used for its initial design purpose, rather a vestige of its former function.

Why white? Seems rather impractical seeing that they are to be driven in dusty or muddy irrigated fields. However, you rarely see these vehicles splattered in brown schmeck. They are generally kept quite white. But why and how? White

paint can represent clean and sanitary. With a crisp, newly-glistening, washed truck the driver appears new, fresh, clean and honest.

It is inevitable that mud gets splattered on these unmarred surfaces at some point in the day. But, somehow by tomorrow it shows up clean again. Who cleans these things? My wager is some other 'lower echelon' staff person does the cleaning-up at the end of the day. Or as my employer advised, "Just bring it down to any of the car washers in town." They were always well attended. A sign that repeatedly humored me as I waited in line behind other soiled white trucks read: '\$5 extra for dangling mud.' This evidently muddied-up their scene, too.

Strong Arm Farm, www.strongarmfarm.com
Reprint by permission only, 2015