

White haze filters the bright light around Freedom Hall in Louisville on the first night of the National Farm Machinery Show. The smell of expired fuel is sharp and distinct, and the thousands of fans—either oblivious to the plumes and fumes, or delirious from them—shout approval as 12,000-HP monsters drag a weight-transfer sled down a 245-foot dirt track on the arena floor. The sled weighs 15 tons when the tractor driver hooks up to it. By the end of the run, it weighs triple that. The modified tractors pulling that sled are burning more than 20 gallons of alcohol fuel in the eight-second trip.

# FULL PULL

**D**RIVERS AND CREW MEMBERS walk a few hundred yards through the mid-February cold between Freedom Hall and the convention facilities at the Kentucky Exposition Center, the staging area for the Wednesday night prelims of the 2015 National Farm Machinery Show (NFMS) Championship Tractor Pull. Lined up along the center of the convention floor are the modified tractors, each weighing around 7,500 pounds, each with four 3,000-HP engines. Each of those engines cost around 70 grand. The two dragster-sized rear tires cost \$4,500 apiece. (For reference, the *total* purse for this *entire event* is around a quarter-million.)

Still, it's "Louisville"—that's how the competitors refer to this pull, simply "Louisville." "Call it the Super Bowl, the World Series, whatever," says the event's announcer, Dave Bennett, a former puller who was also the parts department manager at Livingston Machinery, the AGCO dealership in Chickasha, Okla., for 25 years. "You get all sizes of tractors from all different pulling organizations," he says. "It's the only pull of its kind."

Eight classes of tractors compete over the four-day event, with preliminaries on the weeknights during NFMS and the finals on Saturday night. (For more about the pull and how it works, visit [myFarmLife.com/fullpull](http://myFarmLife.com/fullpull).)

"Everything's different in Louisville," says Barney Palmer, standing in the staging area in front of the GEICO 75th Edition, the modified tractor driven and built by four-time Louisville Grand Champion Joe Eder. Palmer says his official title on the Eder team is "Helper." He makes adjustments, fuels the tractor and tests the engines, "whatever it takes," he says. Those adjustments are critical here, since most pulling tracks are outdoors and at least 50 feet longer. "Louisville is the first pull of the season," says Palmer, who adds they haven't pulled as part of the Lucas Oil Champions Tour since last September, and won't start the new tour until late May. "Nobody knows exactly what's going to happen."

Eder, the boss man, wearing a bright green and blue GEICO tracksuit and a mask of stoicism, agrees. "Run what you brung," says Eder, "and hope you brung enough." >>