

A step up

Invention offers better access to pickups

By Dee Goerge

Pickup owners who have crawled in and out of a pickup box to unload seed corn or tools will appreciate Harold Fratzke's latest invention, the Step Up.

The unit slips on the 2-inch receiver hitch on full-size pickups and is secured simply by tightening a setscrew. Two steps swing out from under the bumper to meet and to lock in place.

"You just walk into your pickup box," Fratzke says of his latest patent-pending invention. The Step Up is being manufactured and marketed by Tebben Enterprise in Clara City, Minnesota.

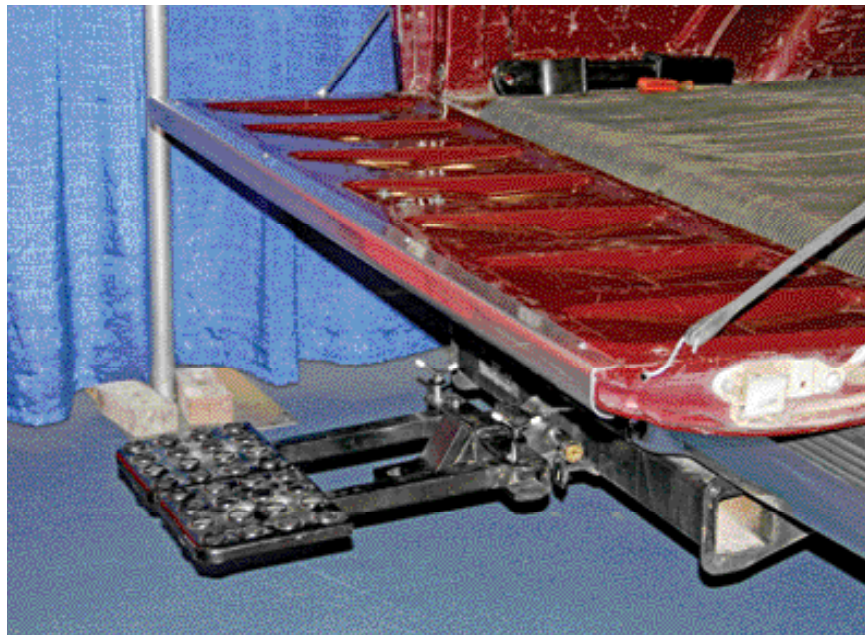
AWARD-WINNING IDEA

Fratzke, a retired Cottonwood, Minnesota, farmer, has had about 20 of his inventions manufactured over the years. As with many of his past inventions, he debuted the Step Up at the Minnesota Inventors Congress in Redwood Falls. Fratzke won the grand prize of \$1,000 and a gold medallion at the 2007 event.

"It was a very popular product at the Congress," he says. "Everybody said there's definitely a need for it."

+ learn more

- Harold Fratzke, 234 Shoreview Drive, Cottonwood, MN 56229
507/423-6341
- Mike Tebben, Tebben Enterprises, 10009 Highway 7 SE, Clara City, MN 56222
320/847-2200 | www.tebben.us



Photograph: Laurie Potter

Harold Fratzke, a retired Minnesota farmer, unveiled his latest invention, the Step Up, at the 2007 Minnesota Inventors Congress. His idea won the \$1,000 grand prize.

It's hard to get in the back of pickups because many are so high. I knew there had to be a simpler way."

The device comes fully assembled. At 26 pounds, it is made of square tubing with two nonskid 8×8-inch steps with 300-pound capacities each. Held with spring-loaded pins, steps automatically lock in place whether out or in.

What sets Fratzke's step apart from other manufactured versions is that the steps work whether the tailgate is open or closed.

One step goes on each side and extends slightly beyond the bumper, Fratzke explains.

"This invention just makes life easier for you," he says.

Because the steps are useful whether the tailgate is up or down, Mike Tebben, president of Tebben Enterprises, liked Fratzke's design the first time he saw it.

The Step Up comes in satin black and retails for \$179. It is available at Tebben's Web site (www.tebben.us), and the company welcomes dealership inquiries. ■

