

## Editor's Notebook



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### Big Farm Equipment, Old Bridges Don't Mix

Big farm equipment and old bridges sometimes don't mix. Just ask John Kruse, an Ogden, Iowa, farm worker who fell through a Boone County bridge in May while crossing it with a tractor and cultivator.

The 102-year-old, 80-ft. steel bridge was slated for replacement in June and it was posted for 6 tons. The 1980 Steiger Panther and 40-ft. Wil-Rich cultivator Kruse was pulling may



Photo courtesy Boone News-Republican

have weighed as much as 17 tons combined, early reports pointed out.

Tom Hollingshead, owner of the tractor, and Dave Anthony, county engineer, doubt that weight was the only factor - if it was one at all - involved in the collapse.

The immediate cause, they told FARM SHOW, appeared to be that a cultivator shank hooked an overhead suspension cable, pulling the bridge down behind the tractor.

However, the underlying cause may have more to do with the continuing deterioration of rural bridges and roads.

"John took a road we never use to get to the other farm and he honestly didn't see the sign," Hollingshead said. "But there are four other bridges within just a few miles of our place that are all in the same condition as this one. While farm equipment has gotten bigger and bigger over the years, bridge maintenance and replacement hasn't kept pace."

In fact, nearly 1/4 of all county and township bridges in rural areas were built before 1940 and have "outlived their effectiveness," according to a USDA study in 1994.

"With the reduction of state and federal funds (since the 1980's), local governments are finding it difficult to maintain their roads and bridges," the study says. "This places even greater pressure on local decision-makers to find creative solutions to local transportation financing issues."

That still leaves many farmers in a lurch. Said Todd Miller of Zenda, Kan.: "The sad thing is that they will blame the farmer for going over a bridge loaded heavier than its rated capacity, instead of blaming the county/state for not keeping up with the needs of today's larger equipment. We have several bridges in our area that are rated at 5 tons and a few at 8 tons. A steer fell through the deck of a 5-ton bridge when cattle were being moved down the road, and he weighed only 800 to 900 lbs. What are farmers supposed to do if they can't legally cross their bridges? Quit or move?"

Meantime, a shook-up Kruse, 63, received only minor scrapes and bruises in the accident, thanks to the Steiger's steel cab which protected him when one of the steel beams fell on it. Likewise, damages to the tractor cab, mirror and

windshield were minor, under an estimated \$2,000. The tractor was removed from the bridge with two tow trucks. The two-year-old cultivator, however, was totaled.

As for the bridge, it'll be replaced with a new concrete slab structure rated at 40 tons this summer.

### Deere Set To Introduce First Rotary Combine?

One of the hottest topics on the internet these days is the rumor that Deere & Company is finally ready to come out with its first rotary combine. It's been widely known for more than 20 years that Deere has had a prototype rotary out in the field. But until now, company officials have always stated that there was no need to market it because conventional combines performed better.

We called Deere spokesman Barry Nelson and he would



Wisconsin farmer says this is a photo of Deere's soon-to-be-introduced rotary combine.

not confirm or deny the rumors about a new combine. But we found a fellow named Tom Langan, who farms near Alma Center, Wis., who says he has photos of the new rotary. He got the photos from a friend who tested the combine on his own farm but who does not want his name revealed. Langan told FARM SHOW he doesn't like the way big machinery companies are so secretive about new equipment. So he set up a web site dedicated to "exposing" Deere's new combine and posted pictures there along with a copy of Deere's patent on its new rotary. You can see the photos at <http://discovernet.net/~twlangan/deere1.htm>.

The rumor gained credibility for us when Deere recently announced that it will be introducing a new line of combines in August, along with other new products. FARM SHOW will be there to take a look.

### Unending Oil Supply

We're not even close to running out of oil, as many in the 1970's feared. In real terms, gas costs 51% less than it did at the height of OPEC power in 1980. In the last 20 years, estimates of global oil reserves have climbed more than 70%, despite record consumption.

In fact, some experts believe petroleum is not a fossil fuel at all but some sort of gloppy syrup that is produced deep down in the earth under extremely hot conditions and is pushed up by intense pressure.

Fueling this theory is the mystery at the Eugene Island oil field in the Gulf of Mexico. From its discovery in 1973 until 1989, a particular well in the field followed the usual pattern of gradually declining production. Then, mysteriously, the well's production soared. Reported the Wall Street Journal, "Stranger still, scientists studying the field say the crude coming out of the pipe is of a geological age quite different from the oil that gushed 10 years ago."

The earth may have sufficient oil to supply our needs for centuries to come. (Forbes)

### Working On Empty Fuel Tanks

In the last two issues of FARM SHOW, readers have discussed how to safely work on empty fuel tanks. We recently talked with a maintenance supervisor at a large oil company which operates service stations. He told us service technicians are trained to use dry ice to "neutralize" empty tanks before working on them. He showed us the company's service manual which recommends 15 lbs. of dry ice for each 1,000 gal. of volume. As the dry ice "melts" it releases carbon dioxide gas and displaces the oxygen. An oxygen meter is then used to be certain the oxygen level is low enough to prevent explosion. Our source recommends that anyone considering work on an empty fuel tank contact an oil company for specific instructions.

A FARM SHOW reader from Michigan called to say that

the only way he would ever work on a gas tank off a tractor, truck or car is to first take the empty tank to a radiator repair shop to have it submerged and boiled. "I had a tank that had been washed with hot water and soap yet still had fumes inside. These tanks are extremely dangerous to work on and every care should be taken," he noted.

### What We Need Now Is A "Smart" Ear Of Corn

Recent reports from Europe about a "smart spud" made us think about how the idea could be used to improve combines, augers, and crop handling other equipment.

The "smart spud" is shaped like an average-sized potato but it's filled with electronic sensors and a transmitter. The idea is to use it to calibrate harvesting or grading equipment to do the least amount of damage to the real potatoes going through. The "smart spud" rides along through the equip-

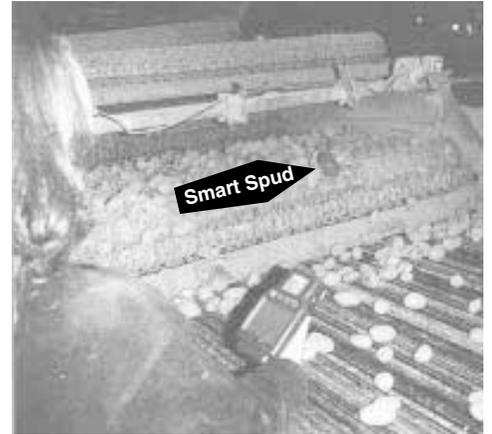


Photo courtesy Farmer's Weekly

ment with the other potatoes, and sends data to a hand-held computer-receiver that displays the data. It gives an easy-to-read analysis of what's going on within parts of the machine that aren't visible.

"It's as easy to use as a stop watch and doesn't require a computer or other special software," says inventor Frank Pirie of Pirie Crop Storage Systems, Dundonald, Ayrshire, England.

It seems like a great idea to us. Why not create a "smart" ear of corn that you could run through a combine to ensure that it's set properly? With computer chips continuing to shrink, maybe they could even create "smart soybeans" or "smart wheat".

### Should Farmer Sue Monsanto For Damaging His Crops?

"I thought you might be interested in this followup to the Percy Schmeiser lawsuit that you mentioned in the last issue," says FARM SHOW reader John G. Ruff, Logan, Kan. "Schmeiser is the Canadian farmer who's being sued by Monsanto because crops on his farms contained the Roundup Ready gene. He claimed that pollen must have blown onto his farm from nearby farms using Roundup Ready seed.

"The last issue of the High Plains Journal contained a story about how English research has found that blown pollen from genetically altered crops can travel more than 400 yards, depending on the crop. The previous limit had been thought to be only 50 yards. Researchers also found instances of up to 3 miles of travel, probably spread by bees.

"It seems to me that with more companies refusing to buy genetically altered grain that Percy Schmeiser has a strong case for suing Monsanto for taking inadequate steps to prevent his crops from being damaged by unwanted pollen. Monsanto might be setting itself up for similar suits if other cases like this one are found.

"Also, I understand that Monsanto is free to take grain samples from farmers where farmers have signed an agreement but what gives it the authority to take samples on farms where there are no agreements? In light of the above research, I'd think that would be the last thing Monsanto would want to find."

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