

New Groundcover Decomposes In One Season

A new compostable groundcover mat made its debut at the recent world AgExpo in California. Placed on the ground between rows or around trees and vines, EcoCover™ suppresses weed growth and preserves soil moisture but then decomposes by the end of the growing season.

Company vice-president Andy Forth says, "The cover blocks sunlight to weed seeds, preserves moisture in the soil and can even be embedded with plant nutrients." Forth's company imported EcoCover to the U.S. from New Zealand, where it has been used successfully for several years.

"It isn't like most ground covers because

it's made from recycled waste paper and organic binders," Forth says. "It's completely compostable, usually within one growing season. Producers can save a great deal of time and labor with this product because they don't have to remove it after the growing season."

Another benefit is that producers can embed a wide range of crop nutrients to help with eliminating the need for mechanical fertilization. Forth says that EcoCover is approved for organic food production. "It provides a very beneficial environment for worm populations because it helps maintain consistent soil moisture

and soil temperature.

"Soil under the EcoCover is uniformly moist and will 'breathe' rather than bake in hot and dry conditions," Forth says. "That means the growing crops have a better environment for producing high yields."

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Compostable groundcover mat is placed on the ground between rows or around trees and vines to suppress weed growth.



Goodbye Metal Shoes; Hello Comfy Horse Boots

Tennis shoes for horses? That's kind of what Cavallo's boots are for horse folks who believe the time for metal horseshoes has come and gone.

Traditional horseshoes restrict hooves from spreading, and metal doesn't exactly absorb shock, notes Carole Herder, president of Cavallo Horse and Rider, a Canadian company that offers a variety of horse-related products.

Some horse owners are moving toward keeping their horses "barefoot". They use the hoof boots when the horse is ridden, or in a trailer. They also help horses recover from injuries. And for those horses that still wear metal shoes, horse boots can be like a "spare tire" for when a horse loses a shoe.

"We try to keep them as simple and basic as possible," Herder says, explaining that the

only measurement needed to get the right size is the length of the hoof.

Cavallo boots are made with tough plastic urethane soles with leather uppers that conform to shape without rubbing. They fasten in front with Velcro® closures.

The boots have built-in drainage for riding through water, and most importantly, Herder says, "They stay on no matter what terrain you're on."

She notes that there are other hoof shoes on the market, but she believes Cavallo boots are simpler, easier to put on and affordable at \$129.95 for a pair. Typically, horses only need the boots on their front hooves.

There are two styles: Simple boots for hooves that are as wide as they are long, and Sport boots for horses with narrower hooves. The Simple boots are available in pink, red,

brown and black.

Boots last about two years for horses ridden 3 to 4 days a week on good terrain, Herder says.

The boots are sold in more than 400 retail stores in the U.S., in catalogs, or direct from Cavallo's website.

"Cavallo has a toll-free line to answer questions about making the transition to barefoot," she says. "We're there to facilitate this big change. We truly think this makes a big difference for the comfort and health of horses."

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Cavallo's boots have tough plastic urethane soles with leather uppers. They fasten in front with Velcro closures.

"Made It Myself" SP Feed Mixer

Guy Tanguay, Saint-Gervais, Quebec, recently sent FARM SHOW photos of a self-propelled feed mixer he built that mixes and conveys feed to both sides of the machine.

"It's designed to maneuver through the narrow feed alleys in my head-to-head tie stall barn and saves time and labor. All operations are fully hydraulic and controlled from the operator's platform," says Tanguay.

The "Ready Mix 700", as Tanguay calls it, is equipped with a 70 cu. ft. capacity mixing tank. A pair of chains with slats, combined with a 12-in. auger, are used to mix grain, protein, silage and chopped hay all together. A 12-in. wide conveyor feeds out to either side.

Power is provided by a Honda 13 hp engine that was converted to run on LP gas. "The LP gas-powered engine is perfect for work inside a barn because it doesn't produce any smoke or toxic fumes," says Tanguay.

The sides of the mixing box are made from 1/8-in. thick steel and the floor is made of stainless steel. Two 30,000-lb. "WH-78" chains with angle-iron slats spaced 16 in. apart, run at low speed providing a fast mix with a low horsepower requirement.

"During filling, the engine runs at idle as it drives the mixing chains together with the auger, which has convergent flighting," says Tanguay. "The auger pushes the ingredients from each side to the center for a more uniform and faster mixing action."

"To unload, I just open a sliding door on front of the tank and the feed drops onto the conveyor. It takes about two minutes to unload the mixer."

A belt-driven hydraulic pump matched with a pair of hydraulic motors (one for each wheel) operates the mixer at the correct speed. A 2-way control valve is connected to a foot-operated pedal, which provides forward-reverse action with speed control. "I added a 'cushion-valve' on the hydraulic

motors to protect them whenever I release the pedal at high speed," says Tanguay.

The mixing mechanism is driven by combining a belt and a bender with some reduction sprockets and chains. The bender is connected to a handle that's used to start and stop the mixer.

The mixer is equipped with an electronic scale that works with a single load-cell. It's connected to a lever supporting the box with eight 1-in. ball bearings, which ensures low friction and gives high precision to the scale. When filling, the scale indicator is connected to a computer fixed to the wall of the barn. The computer controls multiple electric motors that drive grain augers and protein augers, as well as conveyors and silo unloaders that fill the mixer automatically.

"The computer was developed by my brother Simon, who is a computer scientist. It can keep in memory 8 feed recipes with up to 8 ingredients in each one," says Tanguay. "The computer is connected to the electronic scale indicator by an RS-232 serial port. Whenever I want to fill the mixer I just connect a cable to the computer and select the recipe that I want and let it fill automatically. It takes about 5 to 7 minutes to complete a full load in the mixer and another two minutes for mixing correctly before feeding."

Tanguay spent 150 hours and \$8,000 to build "exactly what I wanted" and says he couldn't be happier with the machine.

"I built my first total feed mixer 14 years ago. After many years of operation, it finally wore out. However, I was so satisfied with it that I decided to build a new one with some improvements. Hopefully it'll last 20 years this time!" says Tanguay.

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Home-built, self-propelled feed mixer mixes and conveys feed to both sides of the machine.



A pair of chains with slats, combined with a 12-in. auger, are used to mix grain, protein, silage and chopped hay all together.