

Whatever Happened To Chainsaw-Type Cutterbars?

One important piece of farm machinery that changed very little during the 20th century is the cutterbar. We've heard talk of new inventions – such as a laser cutter – but the only ones we've actually seen built are chain-type cutterbars. We recently followed up with both inventors to see how they've fared.

FARM SHOW published a story in 1998 on Tom Loftus's continuous "chain-type" cutterbar for combine headers (Vol. 22, No. 6). The continuous chain reduces vibration to allow faster combine speed and also reduces shatter. We called Loftus, who farms near Ivesdale, Illinois, to get an update.

"Your article generated phenomenal interest - I could have probably sold 20 units sight unseen," says Loftus. "I received so many calls and letters I could barely handle them all.

"I originally built the unit for my Case-IH 1660 combine equipped with a 20-ft. platform. It worked even better than I had hoped. It cut much cleaner and allowed me to harvest faster than I could have with a conventional grain platform. Last year I made a few improvements on it that worked great."

Loftus had a local machine shop build his 50-ft. long continuous cutter chain, which consists of a continuously rotating chain equipped with replaceable sickle sections. He removed the existing 20-ft. cutterbar and wobble box and replaced them with the new cutting chain and a pair of hydraulic motors. One motor mounts at each end of the chain. As the chain rotates, it returns through a return trough under the platform in a slot that was originally used to store an extra sickle. Chain speed and direction are controlled from the cab.

"The continuously rotating cutterbar has more than twice the cutting surface of a conventional cutterbar and makes equal and full use of all sickle sections. As a result, the sections won't get dull on one spot like they do on a reciprocating cutterbar being used on row crops. Another advantage is that the cutting chain can be run both ways to get full use out of the sickle sections. When the knives are dull on one side, the direction of the chain can be reversed."

Loftus recently entered into an agreement with HCC Inc., which will manufacture the unit. Anyone who wants to get on a mail list for more information should contact HCC, Inc., 1501 First Ave., Mendota, Ill. 61342.

Willard Pearson of Dawson, Minnesota, was the first inventor we ever featured with a "Chain Sickle" for cutting hay, soybeans and small grains (Vol. 9, No. 4). His system also used conventional sickle sections on a specially designed chain that rotated around two sprockets, one of which was adjustable for setting chain tension. A hydraulic orbital motor allowed the operator to vary sickle speed, and also to reverse the chain's direction.

"We had more than 600 inquiries from FARM SHOW's original report," says Pearson. "We installed a working prototype chain sickle on a 7-ft. hay mower and planned on adapting it to fit combines, swathers and mower-conditioners. We had hoped to work out a licensing agreement with a manufacturer but it never worked out."

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Willard Pearson installed this prototype "Chain Sickle" on a 7-ft. hay mower. It used conventional sickle sections on a specially-designed linkage system.



On Pearson's chain sickle, sections turned around two sprockets, one at each end of the bar. One sprocket could be adjusted for tension.



Tom Loftus recently entered into an agreement with HCC, Inc., to produce his patented chain-type cutterbar. His chain cutter can be run in either direction to get full use of sickle sections. When they get dull on one side, you just reverse direction.

Economical Farm Records Software Is "All-Encompassing"

"The Farmer's Bookkeeper" is an "all-in-one" software program that offers advanced financial capabilities at a "middle-of-the-road" price.

Its creator, Roger Jackson of Jonesboro, Arkansas, lived and worked on a farm until he was 20 years old. In 1983, he graduated from Arkansas State University with a bachelor's degree in computer science. After a five-year stint doing custom programming and selling computers, Jackson started his own company, "Diamond Software".

After a friend requested he write a farm software program, he completed the first version of "The Farmer's Bookkeeper" in 1991.

"My friend found it easy to use and it did everything he needed. I decided to show it to other farmers I knew, and every one who looked at the program bought it, even some who were using Quicken or Quickbooks," says Jackson.

The crop records segment of the program allows you to keep track of all of the different crops on each field including the number of acres, the projected price and yield, as well as the actual price and yield for each crop. You can apply expenses to specific fields and crops, then print an expense report by field, crop, and date. It will give you the total expenses, gross income, and net income for each field. There is a diary that will record any information by date. It stores field records for each year so you can print out yields and income for past years, giving you

an average for however many years you want. You can store spraying records, including fertilizer, chemicals, and restricted pesticides. The program includes all of the information that is required by the USDA and EPA concerning restricted and non-restricted chemicals.

The cattle record-keeping segment of the program was developed in conjunction with animal science professors at Arkansas State University. You can specify different herds and each animal can be entered by animal ID number, registration number, or tattoo number. You can specify its breed, sex, and whether it is for breeding or for sale. The software will keep track of birth, weaning, purchase, and sale information. You can also record each animal's health records, including weight, body condition, and hip height. Herd vaccinations can be recorded by date.

There is a machinery inventory section that will record VIN numbers, description, hours in use, purchase information, resale value, sale information, loan amount and balance, and a comments section to enter any information about that piece of equipment.

"What sets The Farmer's Bookkeeper apart from many other programs on the market, is its financial capabilities," Jackson says. "You can enter expense checks and the program will print the check on a printer, or you can hand write the check and enter it later. As you enter the check, you can immediately apply any or all of the check to field, cattle, or machinery expenses. You can also apply

the check directly to the general ledger that is also included within the program. There is no need for multiple entries into your field or cattle records. You don't have to maintain a separate financial journal."

You can also enter bank deposits and apply those to your general ledger. If you set up your general ledger and post the checks and deposits to it, you can even reconcile your bank account. The general ledger can be as simple or as comprehensive as you want. You can set up asset, liability, capital, income, and expense accounts. This will allow you to produce balance sheets and income statements. Or you can just set up the income and expense accounts to only produce an income statement. Or you can just print out a list of your checks and deposits to send to your accountant. How you want to set up your financial reporting is up to you. The Farmer's Bookkeeper is not designed to replace your accountant, but rather to organize your information, making your accountant's job easier, taking less time, and saving you money.

The Farmer's Bookkeeper also includes a payroll option. Enter your employee's information and produce payroll checks that include a check stub showing all of the current withholdings and the year to date earnings. You can print a payroll listing for all or individual employees for any specified range of dates. You can even print W2 forms at the end of the year.

"There are few, if any, programs that are

designed for farmers that give you all of this in one package," Jackson explains. "There are several programs that are in the \$50 to \$150 range that will do field or cattle record keeping. There are some good programs in that same range that do the financial part of your business, but are designed for general business, not farming. There are also farm programs available that are in the \$2,000 to \$4,000 range that do everything. However, there do not seem to be any programs in between."

The Farmer's Bookkeeper is priced in two ways. If you need only the field records or just the cattle records, the price is \$599. If you want to include both options, the price is \$799. This price includes the program CD, operator's manual, shipping and handling, plus telephone support if you have any questions. Any applicable sales tax is extra.

A trial CD is available for \$5. This includes the entire program with sample data that you can look at and print out. You cannot enter data into the trial program — you can just look at the information that is there. This will show you all of the features of the program. The \$5 will be credited to you upon purchase of the full program.

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