

They Bought Their Own Grain Elevator

By Pat Rediger

Want to buy your own grain elevator? For Sale signs are appearing on elevators throughout the western prairies and many producers are giving them a close look.

Grain handling companies are selling their wood crib elevators to make way for new concrete structures. A Saskatchewan real estate broker recently contracted to sell up to 180 elevators.

The For Sale signs caught the attention of Larry, Len and Sheldon Blenkin, who operate Whispering Pines Farm near Sentaluta, Sask. They decided to make inquiries.

"We knew we could use it and didn't want to see it torn down," explains Larry. "It was in a good location, right on the main highway." So they contacted the company. They discovered that the taxes were higher than they expected because of the liability insurance against fire.

However, insurance was a minor issue compared to negotiating with the railway, which runs alongside the elevator. "They wouldn't let us buy the land," says Larry. "Making a deal with them was the biggest obstacle because they only wanted to lease the land and we wanted to buy it. There is not much security in leasing. They wanted a renewable lease and that creates a lot of uncertainty."

After six months of negotiations, the Blenkins finally reached an agreement and took possession of the elevator in April, 2000. The Blenkins' primary intention is to use it for grain storage, but since it's in perfect working order, they may consider other uses for it, such as specialty processing.

The Blenkins have no intention of moving the elevator closer to their farm because of

the tremendous amount of work involved.

This elevator contains a significant amount of concrete so the power to move it would cost a substantial amount. They aren't planning any major modifications to the elevator, but maintaining it in its present condition will incur expenses. "We just want to make sure the grounds are kept up. We like to keep the weeds at least 10 feet away. Patrolling for rats and mice will cost at least \$600 per month. So there are things like that we will have to do," says Larry.

The Blenkins are fairly familiar with the technology in the elevator but fortunately, the former elevator manager still lives in the community and has offered to help them on any parts of the elevator they don't completely understand. If they need help with the cleaner, for example, the former manager is just a phone call away.

Larry says the elevator offers tremendous benefits to their operation. "It's handy for hauling from the combine; there is no plowing snow to get to it; and we needed a scale to weigh our seed. This elevator has a digital scale. It is also very convenient for us and offers good office facilities," he says. Since the elevator is on a major railway, there is also easy access for railcar shipping.

Before embarking upon such an endeavor, the Blenkins advise that you know all of the costs involved before you enter into an agreement. There are items that can come up after the agreement has been signed and if you haven't been cautious, you could end up paying for it.

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When this elevator recently went up for sale, the Blenkins of Sentaluta, Sask., bought it. "It's on a major railway and a major road, so it's ideal for shipping," they say.

Front-Mount Bale Unroller

Bob Willats, Orchard, Neb., needed a round bale unroller but he didn't want to spend the money for a commercial unit. He came up with a low-cost solution by mounting a pair of 14-in. wheels on spindles that bolt to the front of his Deere 4020 tractor.

The wheels, spaced 2 ft. apart and about 1 ft. off the ground, spin freely. To unroll a bale, Willats simply drives forward and pushes the wheels against the bale.

"It's a simple, low-cost system with almost nothing to go wrong," says Willats, who runs a cow-calf operation and also a feedlot. "I've used it for two years to feed alfalfa bales to my cows. I use a 3-pt. bale fork on the tractor to haul the bale from my yard to the field, where I drop it off. Then I turn the tractor around and roll it out.

"Most of the bales I unroll are wrapped with sissal twine and are one to two years old. The twine has decomposed on the bottom side and falls apart as soon as I start pushing the bale. As a result I don't even have to get off the tractor. Sometimes the bale gets wet

and flattens out so much on the bottom that it's hard to roll out. If that happens I use the bale fork to flip the bale over and get the flat part off the ground. Once I can get the bale to start moving it'll keep on rolling out. The only limitation to my bale unroller is that it doesn't work in deep snow.

"I got the wheels off an old anhydrous ammonia toolbar, and a friend gave me the steel for the frame so my only cost was my time. I had been making hay in stacks and using a grapple fork to dump it on the ground. I didn't like how the cattle wasted the feed so I switched to round bales. With my bale unroller there's hardly any waste."

"Whenever I want to use the tractor for other purposes I just pull two steel pins to remove the wheels from the frame. It takes only about 30 seconds to put the wheels back on again," notes Willats.

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The wheels, spaced 2 ft. apart and about 1 ft. off the ground, spin freely.



Bob Willats built his own low-cost bale unroller by mounting a pair of 14-in. wheels on spindles that bolt to the front of his Deere 4020 tractor.

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