

# Owners Report On McLeod Harvest System

After 10 years of development, the McLeod Harvest System is gradually making its way onto farms and ranches on the Canadian prairie. We tracked down the first four buyers of McLeod harvesters to see how it's working.

The McLeod system consists of two parts: a pull-type harvester, which collects the chaff in the field but doesn't thresh it and a stationary grain mill usually located by storage bins. It cleans the crop with a conventional cylinder and sieves.

McLeod Harvest sold its first complete system two years ago to Don Armitage, a Manitoba grain and cattle producer. Three more systems were delivered last year. Another 10 systems were sold for the 2003 harvest season, and McLeod hopes to sell 30 systems in 2004.

**Don Armitage, Miniota, Manitoba:** Armitage says he's proud and lucky to own the first McLeod Harvest System sold. He's harvesting his third crop with it this fall.

"I first heard about his research in 1994 and continued to follow what he was doing," Armitage says. "The system made a lot of sense to me, economically, and I couldn't wait to try it out.

"In the first two years, we used it on close to 3,000 acres of wheat, barley, flax, canola, peas and lentils," he says.

With 130 beef cows, he figured he could use the extra feed he collects out the back of the stationary grain cleaner. "We still make hay or silage for stocker cattle, but the mother herd lives on the millings, supplemented with barley, minerals and vitamins," he says.

"It's a lot less work to collect the millings than it is to make hay or silage, and we're making use of a feed product that would otherwise be left in the field."

He calculates he's harvested an extra 300 tons of feed in each of the two years he's used the McLeod system. He figures the value of some of the millings, particularly those from legumes, is as high as \$80 a ton. That comes to \$24,000 worth of feed a year.

"We had some minor problems with the cleaning mill, but the McLeod people were here immediately to take care of it," he says.

The fact that the McLeod system is less expensive to buy up front, along with the extra feed collected, makes it easy to justify for a crop and livestock farmer, says Armitage.

**"I collected enough chaff during harvest last year to winter 150 cows."**

He uses a Case IH 7140 Magnum with mechanical front wheel drive to pull the harvester. The electric-powered cleaning mill costs about \$1 an hour to operate.

Armitage feels the McLeod system has slowed his harvest a little, but adds: "It's easy

to put up with that for the amount of extra feed collected."

**Murray Mullin, Cartwright, Manitoba:** "I collected enough chaff during harvest last year to winter 150 cows," says Mullin.

The chaff, or millings, as McLeod calls them, is comparable to good quality slough hay. "You can winter a cow on it, but you'll need to supplement with protein, minerals and some grain, but you'd probably do that anyway," Mullin says.

Mullin doesn't own cattle, but sells the feed to his brother.

Mullin ran his McLeod Harvester over about 1,500 acres last year and would have done more, but after a long rainy period delayed harvest, he was forced to bring in a combine to work alongside it in order to speed up harvest.

He says if he'd had another McLeod machine, he wouldn't have bothered with the combine.

He says the McLeod harvester and mill are reliable, well-built machines that have the potential to increase profitability for a combination grain and livestock farm.

"It harvests the same grain as a combine, but generates another \$30 to \$35 an acre in millings," he says.

Money was the big reason Mullin was interested in the McLeod system, which he bought for \$185,000 (Canadian). "A new combine with comparable capacity will cost around \$300,000," he says. "They both harvest the same amount of grain. If you have 2,000 acres of crops and collect millings worth \$30 an acre, that's a \$60,000 advantage for the McLeod system."

That difference, he figures, will pay for the entire McLeod system in a little more than two years.

Mullin wishes the McLeod machine were self-propelled, but he knows that that would come with a higher price tag. "One thing I like is that the hitch allows you to use it on either side of the tractor so that it's more maneuverable than the old pull-type combines."

Mullin uses a Versatile 846 to pull the harvester in the field. He says the 250 hp trac-



Pull-type harvester collects grain and chaff in the field but doesn't thresh it.

tor is just right to allow the harvester to work at peak capacity.

Mullin's stationary cleaning unit is powered by electricity. Although he'd have preferred a diesel powered one, he says the result is the same. "The cleaner is easier to adjust than the sieves and chaffers on most combines, and since it's completely automatic, it doesn't require more labor," he says.

Mullin's only problem with the McLeod system is that there are no used machines available. "I usually don't buy new equipment," he says.

**Robert Bickley, Red Deer, Alberta:** "I'm thrilled with the machine," says Bickley. That, despite the fact that 2002 was a year he'd rather forget.

"After a summer of drought, we had three snow storms during harvest," he says. "The volume of grain was about half what we normally produce, and everything that went through the harvester was tough. It put the machine to a real test," he says.

Feed supplies were tight in his area last year because of the dry growing season, so even though they got only about half the volume of millings they'd anticipated at the beginning of the year, the extra feed was worth a lot. "It meant we had enough feed for our 100-cow herd," he says.

"We did have some minor mechanical problems with the harvester, but the McLeod engineers were here all fall working beside us, so we didn't have a lot of downtime," he says.

Bickley just turned the farming business over to his son. He says they've added another 200 head of cattle or so for backgrounding, so they're counting on the millings for feed even more this year.

The Bickleys mixed the millings half and half with alfalfa silage for feeding. "It makes a very good quality feed for range cows," he says. "If we had a normal crop year, I think it would allow us to run another 100 range cows, with very little additional cost."

"The McLeod Harvester does an excellent job of harvesting, and handles well behind the tractor," he says. They used an AGCO 9765 190-hp front wheel assist tractor for the harvester.

Bickley's son pulls the harvester while he hauls the grain and chaff back to the mill at the bin site.

"The bin on the harvester is sized to fill a standard 20-ft. truck-mounted silage box," he says. "We have enough hydraulic capacity on the tractor to unload the harvester on the go. When you get to the mill, you back the truck in, dump the load, and turn the mill on with a remote control in the truck. You never have to get out. Our system is set up so the grain is automatically transferred into storage bins, and the millings are blown into a pile about 200 ft. away. You can even move



Stationary grain mill is positioned by storage bins. It cleans the crop with a conventional cylinder and sieves.

the millings pipe by remote control."

Solick has about 250 beef cows and has long felt he was throwing away a lot of feed behind the combine. "With this system, we're collecting all that feed, and removing the weed seeds from the field, too," he says.

Solick used his McLeod Harvest system last year to harvest nearly 2,000 acres of barley, wheat and canola.

Pulling it with an AGCO 9670, he tried out both direct cut and pickup heads and even a stripper head. They all worked fine.

He likes the fact that the harvester comes with a straw cutter on it, but says feed was so short last year they didn't use the cutter. "We let everything drop behind the combine and baled it all for bedding and feed," he says.

"We make silage for our 250 head of cattle, but the millings ended up being about half of

**"I have some hilly ground where we ran into problems with the harvester settings."**

our feed last year," he says. "In a good crop year, we're figuring now that we could rely on the millings for as much as three-quarters of what we'd need for winter feed. But we need a good year to be sure."

Solick says there were a few bugs in the system. "I have some hilly ground and we ran into problems with the harvester settings on that," he says. However, the McLeod engineers were there right away to help work out the problem.

"The machine is very well built," he says. "And I think it has a lot of potential for the cow-calf producer or feedlot. Even a grain producer with no livestock could profit from it, by selling the millings to a beef or dairy farmer."

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Chaff, weed seeds and other crop residue normally blown out the back of the combine and onto the field are piled up for use as livestock feed.