They Put Up 9,000 Bales A Day With 30-Bale Accumulator

Ray Sponcil and his farm crew make 60,000 to 80,000 bales of wheat straw a year for sale to horse farms in Kentucky, plus several thousand bales of hay. They needed a faster way to handle them. Ray's father, Ollie, solved the problem by building three 30-bale accumulators to fit their New Holland 5070 balers. Now they can bale, transport and store 9,000 bales a day.

"At one time, we had four 10-bale accumulators and handlers in the field," recalls Sponcil. "I off-loaded the bales back at the barn with a 30-bale handler and had so much time between loads that I could have double-cropped soybeans while I waited."

The 30-bale handler was built by Dave Steffen, Steffen Systems, Salem, Ore. "Dave was the only one who would build what we needed," says Sponcil. "He put two 15-bale handlers together, and we built the brackets for our telehandler."

After using the big handler to unload, Sponcil decided they needed bigger accumulators as well. He made a scale model for a 30-bale unit out of Erector set parts and then went full size. The accumulator worked even better than expected.

A paddle on the baler flips bales on a cut edge as they come off the baler. A grab chain channels them to the accumulator platform and between a press arm and a guide bar. As two bales move into place end to end, an electronic switch is triggered. The press arm pushes the pair and the guide bar back before resetting. As each set of bales is pushed back, the guide bar, which also is attached to 557 chain, moves to the rear. At the same time, a second bar called the unloading bar also mounted to the drive chain is moving forward above the bales.

When the platform is full, the guide bar has reached the rear of the platform, and the unloading bar has reached the front. This triggers hydraulic cylinders that tilt the platform so the rear edge touches the ground. Within seconds, a hydraulic motor on the chain drive kicks in, and the unloading bar pushes the load of bales off and onto the ground as the tractor and baler continue forward.

"Although we didn't plan it, the first time we ran the accumulator, we realized the tilt cylinders require so much hydraulic fluid that there is a slight delay before the unloading bar starts pushing the bales off," says Sponcil. "This helps keep the bales from dropping. They slide onto the ground in such a tight bundle that you can't pull a bale out of the center."

When his son started using the first accumulator, Sponcil was surprised to discover it packed 32 bales into the space of 30. Likewise the 30-bale handler picked up 32 bales, and they stayed compact and tight, fitting on a 30-bale per layer wagon. In fact, they are so tight that you can only pull bales loose at either end.

"We can load 160 bales (5 layers) on a wagon in less than 5 min. and pull two wagons to the barn at a time," says Sponcil. "We had one guy tie down at the field, and another untie loads at the barn. Now we are going to 40-ft. semitrailers that hold 320 bales, with sides that eliminate the need for tie downs. They move the bales faster between field and barn."

Ollie Sponcil built three 30-bale accumulators to fit their New Holland 5070 balers.

Sponcil built 4 of the big accumulators and sold one. He also had a second handler built for use in the field. It replaced the four 10-bale handlers used previously.

"The combination of accumulators, handlers and semi trailers lets us put up straw bales about five times as fast as before," says Sponcil. "Now I have trouble keeping up with the balers."

While each accumulator has been refined a bit, they all follow the same basic design. Sponcil says they have minimal interest in building accumulators for sale.

"If we did build to sell, we would be asking at least $40,000 for the accumulator due to all the hydraulics and electronics," he says. "We would be more interested in selling the design to a manufacturer."

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Ollie Sponcil, 11168 Bonner Rd., Greenfield, Ohio 45123 (ph 937 763-2392; osponcil@yahoo.com).

Perennial Onions Never Go To Seed

"These onions taste like the ones I remember."

Stanley Jobe hears that all the time about the Family Heirloom Onions he grows and sells from his Roans Prairie, Texas, farm.

"They have a sweet but spicy taste and the flavor holds up in cooking," Jobe says. "They're good in stir fry and Cajun dishes."

The multiplier onion variety dates back more than 100 years to family friends who were Cajun and lived in Louisiana. The onions reproduce from bulbs and never go to seed. In the South, they're planted in August about 6 in. apart and are ready to eat by late fall. For onions to eat the following year, he leaves some in the ground until June or July, then harvests them and hangs them to cure. In August, some of the bulbs can be replanted. Though they can be left in the ground year-round, the bulbs get smaller and smaller, Jobe says.

Jobe and his wife, Jill, have nearly 4 acres of land that they rotate to plant onion bulbs in August. It's very labor intensive, and he's been trying to have equipment made with no success so far. The onions are planted by hand, and Jobe cultivates every 3 or 4 weeks, plus does hand weeding. He's considering using pre and post-emergent herbicides to control weeds in the future. The onions need plenty of water to grow, which has been a challenge in the drought area. At harvest time, he loosens the soil with a shovel, pulls the onions and lets them dry a couple of days before hanging them upside down inside.

He has sold bulbs to customers as far north as Illinois and Washington, where he recommends planting the bulbs in the spring after the ground thaws. With good water and soil they can grow to maturity in 10 months. But they can be harvested as early as 60 days and used like scallions.

"If planted in potassium and calcium-rich soils they become round bulbs. Other soils produce smaller bulbs," Jobe says.

Family Heirloom Onions reproduce from bulbs and never go to seed. "They have a sweet but spicy taste," says grower Stanley Jobe.

Though the onions are labeled for Zone 5 or higher, Jobe says he thinks they will grow in colder zones.

"Save a 10-ft. row and you'll have plenty to plant," he says. Each bulb typically multiplies up to 8 or more bulbs.

He sells 7 oz. of onion bulbs for $13 and 16 oz. for $18, including shipping. A 7-oz. bag has between 25 and 40 bulbs, depending on the size.

Jobe sells the bulbs wholesale to local stores and through his website - through September or until his supply runs out.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Stanley Jobe, Jobe Gardens, P.O. Box 36, Roans Prairie, Texas 77875 (ph 936 874-3023; stanley.jobe@gmail.com; www.jobegardens.com).

Overhead gravity box feed bin sets on a 12-ft. high steel frame and is covered by an Ag Topper clamp-on steel

Overhead Feed Bin Built From Gravity Box

"I built an overhead feed bin out of an old center dump gravity box. It's easy to use. I just drive my flatbed truck under it and load feed into a hopper on back," says Steven Kreitman, Bassett, Neb.

Kreitman bought the 10-ft. long gravity box used. It sets on a 12-ft. high steel frame made from 4-in. I-beams and 4-in. dia. pipes off an old Valley center pivot. Kreitman made clamps out of angle iron and 1/2-in. bolts to attach the box to the I-beams.

The box is covered by an Ag Topper clamp-on steel lid (ph 888 310-1265; www.toppsmfg.com). The company custom builds steel lids to fit gravity wagons, fertilizer spreaders, tender trucks or any other box as a permanent alternative to a roll top.

The box came with an 18-in. sq. opening and a slide gate that was opened and closed by turning a wheel on one side of the box. Kreitman's hopper only holds 500 lbs. so he used 1/8-in. thick sheet metal to partially cover the opening, then made 2 small openings that are covered by slide gates. By turning an 8-ft. long metal rod he can open and close an 8 by 12-in. opening from the ground to fill the hopper. The other opening is only 6 in. sq. and is used to "top off" the load. Kreitman climbs onto the pickup's flatbed to open and close it.

"It holds about 9 tons of feed," says Kreitman. "I paid $750 for the Ag Topper cover and another $750 for the gravity box. The I-beams came from an old beam-type scale. I thought I would save money by building it myself, but my cost per ton of storage was almost equal to commercial-built units that hold 20 or more tons.

"I really like the Ag Topper all-weather lid. I can partially open it from the ground by pulling back on a lever, which makes it easy to fill.

"The only limitation is that the box's sides aren't angled steeply enough so all the feed doesn't always run out. At the end of the season I have to climb inside and shovel out any leftover material. I placed a ladder alongside the box so I can climb to the top."

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Steven Kreitman, 45128 WPA Rd., Bassett, Neb. 68714 (ph 402 684-2201).