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He Designed His Own Loader-Mounted Bale Chopper

"Our new loader-mounted bale chopper can handle both small and big square bales. I built the first one for myself. It worked so well, I put it on the market. At \$7,500 it's affordably priced," says Regan Garber, Greenville, Ohio.

The West Branch Bale Pro is designed to handle sections of big square bales or multiple small squares. A powder-coated steel frame supports a 52-in. dia. poly tub. Bales are loaded in the top, rotated across a knife rotor, and discharged out the side. The knife rotor has 19 reversible assemblies arranged in a spiral pattern. A remote-controlled electric actuator regulates the tub grate's height, which raises and lowers the bale on the knives to control cut length. An adjustable deflector blows material out up to 15 ft. or more.

The chopper is operated by a hydraulic motor that operates off tractor hydraulics, and comes with an on-board battery that eliminates the need for any electrical hook-ups to the skid loader. A flow control valve is used to regulate tub speed.

"It works great with straw or hay and runs on standard flow hydraulics. With the chopper mounted on front of the skid loader, you can drive through freestall pens blowing bedding into the stalls as you go. You do have to remove the strings before loading the bale," says Garber.

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SmartGuard monitor works by electronically monitoring a piglet's squeals, then sends an electronic vibration to sow's lower stomach through a small wearable patch. When sow feels the vibration, she shifts positions or stands up.

System Saves Pigs From Being Crushed

As a teenager working on an Iowa pig farm, Mathew Rooda was always upset when a mother sow crushed one or more of her newborn piglets. "One morning I walked into the farrowing house and saw that a sow had crushed 8 of her piglets. That's when I knew something had to be done."

A few years later as a student at the University of Iowa, Rooda and his good friend Abraham Espinoza invented a solution to the problem that they call the SmartGuard Monitor. The electronic monitoring system has undergone two years of testing and is now being used by large hog farms in Iowa.

Rooda says the device works by electronically monitoring the wavelengths and frequencies of a piglet's squeals, then sends a gentle electronic vibration to the sow's lower stomach through a small wearable patch. When the sow feels the vibration or impulse, she shifts positions or stands up. "If the first vibration doesn't work, another is given 5 seconds later and then 2 additional vibrations are given until the sow moves," Rooda says. "We've consulted with veterinarians during the development process to ensure the device isn't painful to the sow. The vibrations are 25 to 50 percent milder than those from an electronic dog collar."

Rooda says their tests show that the SmartGuard system is typically triggered 2 to 3 times during the 4 to 6 days when it's in use after piglets are born. "If each of those triggers saves the life of a piglet, which is worth about \$38, we're saving that producer a lot of money," Rooda says.

Swine Tech developed the SmartGuard over the past two years, running pilot tests on commercial farms that showed a 74 percent success rate. The company has since raised close to \$2 million from startup contests, grants and funding from outside investors to market the product. Swine Tech is also developing a device that provides real-time health analysis of each sow. It enables producers to detect, isolate and treat a potential viral outbreak in their facilities.

The SmartGuard bundle, which includes the monitor, two wearables, and 140 patches, costs \$1,219. Each unit covers 140 sows annually because it's moved every 5 days. According to Swinotech's ROI calculator, the device should pay for itself in one year.

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Designed for Class 7, 8 and 9 Case IH combines, Cone Guard requires no modification to the existing transition cone. Once bolted in place, it simply covers any holes or worn areas.

Do-It-Yourself Kit Fixes Case IH Combines

When transition cones on his Case IH class 9 combines wore out, Ray Bok was facing hefty replacement costs so he decided to build his own. They worked so great that his local Case IH dealer wanted to sell them, so Bok got into the business.

"As farmers, when we have a problem, we look for a way to fix it," says Bok. "Cone Guard doesn't require any modification to the existing transition cone. Once bolted in place, it simply covers any holes or worn areas."

It consists of 5 panels of 10-gauge AR400 steel. Installation is much easier and thus less costly than replacing the OEM cone.

"Replacement requires pulling the rotor out of the machine," says Bok. "That takes a huge amount of time and labor. The Cone Guard panels cost 1/3 less than an OEM cone and take much less time to install."

Installing the Cone Guard does require removing the feeder throat and the transport vanes. Once the panels are slipped into place and fixed, the transport vanes and feeder throat are reinstalled.

Bok first tried stainless steel. "We didn't get the wear we wanted," he says. "That's why we went to the AR400 steel. It's 3 times harder than stainless so it's tougher to work with, but it lasts longer."

Bok sells the Cone Guard for \$1,500 per kit. The kit works on all Class 7, 8 and 9 Case IH combines. Patents are pending in both the U.S. and Canada.

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