

Revolutionary Silage Bagger Machine Being Tested In Iowa

By Lorn Manthey, Contributing Editor

After 11 years of working on a revolutionary new bagging machine, Mike Koelker is proud to say he's finally got a RamPack silage bagger prototype that's ready for testing on several Iowa farms this summer.

"It's been a long process with many ups and downs along the way, including having two potential manufacturers pull the plug on development agreements at the 11th hour," says Koelker. "After that I totally thought the machine would never get beyond my farm. Then a customer for the plastic wrap I sell showed up and we started talking. One thing led to another and eventually the two of us charted a new direction."

Koelker's customer was Matt Mills, who operates Mills Mid-Iowa Machinery, a short-line equipment dealership that serves farmers across southeast Iowa. Before opening his dealership, Mills had spent nearly 30 years on product design and equipment development. That experience told him that Koelker's idea had merit. Within a short time Koelker and Mills formed an alliance to see the Ram Pack

through development and production.

Mills and Koelker say the game plan is to field trial and perfect the current prototype during 2017 and market production machines in 2018. The Ram Pack, which bags silage, grain, compost, and other materials into a continuous-fed poly bag, is powered by tractor pto. Bazooka Farm Star will have worldwide distribution rights for the production model, while Koelker Plastics and Mills Mid-Iowa Machinery will have sole dealership rights in Iowa.

Koelker says when the idea for Ram Pack came to him back in 2006 he knew it had merit. At the time he was farming and custom bagging silage. He knew there had to be a way to speed up the slow and tedious process of bagging. "One day I was bagging and in a nearby field the farmer was making large square bales, and I realized that concept might also work for bagging silage."

Koelker put his thoughts on paper and sketched out a machine that used a plunger to fill a plastic forage bag rather than a rotor or auger like existing machines. His first prototype, which he says was about 1/4 the size of what he'd eventually need, used the feeding and plunger mechanism from a small square baler. Koelker says "It worked great, so I decided to patent the idea and build a full-size machine to make sure it worked at that size."

During the search for a suitable manufacturer, Koelker had 3 pre-production



Pto-operated RamPack silage bagger uses dual plungers to fill a plastic forage bag, instead of a rotor or auger. Developers say it will speed up the process of bagging.

units made by a local welding shop. "Although the fit and finish was acceptable, the units had one major flaw: the dual rams put too much torque on the gearboxes and ultimately the gearboxes failed. This has been addressed on the current prototype being engineered, designed, and built by Bazooka FarmStar of Washington, Iowa."

Both Koelker and Mills say the Ram Pack has advantages over other machines currently on the market. "Rotary or auger-fill machines need a large tractor to power them. The Ram Pack has dual plungers that gain inertia

from a flywheel, just like a baler. A lower horsepower tractor will keep that flywheel turning and save fuel," Mills says.

Koelker says that after 11 years of working on his invention he now believes all the elements are in place to make it a successful commercial machine.

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Hand Grip Helps Pull-Start Small Engines

Anyone with severe arthritis who has trouble gripping a pull-start handle will be interested in this new device that eliminates the need for a tight hand grip.

The patented GripStart device works with virtually any size or style pull-start engine handle. It can be used on everything from lawn mowers to weed whackers, chainsaws, leaf blowers, generators, and so forth.

The unit's neoprene and nylon strap secures around your wrist, and an ergonomic metal hook rests directly in the center of your palm. The middle part of the hook has a slot in it for the rope, with room for a finger on each side. As you grab the handle with your fingers, it automatically slides into place across the hook.

"The hook grasps the handle tight, so the only strength you need to start the engine is coming from your arm," say co-inventors Chris Orsulak and Tom Coakley. "You don't have to worry that the handle will slip through



GripStart's nylon strap secures around your wrist, while a metal hook rests in your palm. The hook has a slot in it for the rope, with room for a finger on each side.

your fingers if your grip gives out. Once the engine is running, you just slip your hand and the GripStart away from the handle."

GripStart sells for \$29.99 with free shipping.

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Popped Sorghum Anyone?

Popped sorghum may not be a movie theater option in the near future, but it is gaining popularity through online and niche market sales. Researchers at Texas A&M University continue to work on sorghum varieties with good popping traits.

"Sorghum has never been bred for popping," explains Nicholas Pugh, a graduate research assistant in Dr. Bill Rooney's sorghum breeding laboratory at Texas A&M. It's the white sorghum that is most suitable for popping.

The big difference with popped sorghum is its size. "Kernels are much smaller than popped corn kernels," Pugh says.

The researcher started working with sorghum lines that came from a cross originally developed to study the genetics of grain mold resistance.

"My studies show that it's possible to improve popping quality. Eventually we could breed hybrids," Pugh says.



Popped sorghum kernels are much smaller than popped corn kernels.

In 2011 he grew sorghum in three locations in Texas. Planted at the end of March and harvested in mid-August, the sorghum grown in the driest environment did the best.

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