



Bill Waterman and his family repair or rebuild damaged forage chopper boxes.



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They Repair Or Buy Damaged Forage Chopper Boxes

Bill Waterman and his family rebuild chopper boxes to "nearly as good as new" within a 500-mile radius of their Boscobel, Wis., shop.

"We work with insurance companies as well as individuals who call us in when a chopper box gets damaged," says Bill Waterman, Waterman's Forage/Chopper Box Repair and Sales. "We determine actual cash value, give them a bid to fix it, and one for salvage. Many times we can fix it for half what it would cost to replace."

Waterman started the company after being asked by a friend to repair a shaft on his chopper box some 30 years ago. At the time he ran a sawmill, doing mechanical repairs on the side. When a tornado damaged a bunch of chopper boxes, owners heard Waterman could fix them. Soon insurance companies and owners of

damaged chopper boxes were calling, and Waterman stopped sawing logs.

This past winter he and his wife Sheri turned the business over to sons Brock and Thad. However, when Thad developed a rare form of cancer, Bill and Sheri stepped back in to help.

Over the years the tools, equipment and skills needed grew with the business. "We have to be able to do woodworking, mechanical repair, welding and painting," says Waterman. "We like to do our own recovery work, so we have to have trailers equipped with winches. We also have a large skid steer with winches front and back to take to jobs if needed. We are pretty well set up now. We can handle most anything, including the newer, large truck-mounted boxes."

When Waterman says repair, he isn't talking about just pounding out some dents

or replacing a part or two. "We take the head off, lift the top off and remove the sides," says Waterman. "We take the floor off and make any repairs needed to the frame or running gear. When we put it back, we make sure everything is perfectly square."

If damaged, the head gets special attention. The Watermans tear it apart, replacing any damaged parts and realigning it before putting it back together. "We use a stationary motor to run and test the head and then the complete box," says Waterman. "We check the webs and bearings and then run it for about half an hour to be sure everything works as it should."

In a final step, they attach a sticker to the head with the company name on it. Waterman recounts with pride being told that chopper boxes with their name on it at auction will outsell those without it. That includes the

ones so badly damaged the insurance company or the owner sold them for salvage.

"We rebuild about 75 percent of the boxes but, if salvaged, they may go for parts or I'll fix them over winter," says Waterman. "I write the former owner's name on the box, and when it is fully repaired, I'll offer it to them for my price. About 75 to 80 percent who come to look at their old chopper box take it home with them. If not, they go on our sale lot."

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Rare Breeds Featured In His Ram Catalog

The Ram Catalog from Super Sire Ltd. is a fast way to introduce new blood into your sheep flock or even start a new flock from an old breed. The catalog offers semen from rams representing 42 breeds from the common Hampshire and Columbia to Isle De France and Rakka (Vol. 40, No. 3). Rams included are from domestic as well as foreign flocks. The one thing common to most of them is that Martin Dally has personally visited their farms and inspected the rams.

"We've brought in many different breeds and upgraded others," says Dally, founder of Super Sire Ltd. "Karakuls were here, but they hadn't had any new genetics since 1954. Inbreeding was a problem. And we imported the first Black Welsh Mountain sheep semen."

Sometimes once common breeds like the horned Dorsets need to be reinvigorated. Dally recently visited New Zealand and Australia to locate Dorset flocks with characteristics desired by North American breeders.

Some breeds didn't exist in North America before Dally brought them in. One of these is the Gotland, a Swedish breed.

"I fell in love with them and wanted to bring them in," says Dally. "The same with Kerry Hill."

About 70 percent of the time a new breed is someone else's idea. "They come to me and say, 'I love this breed. Can you bring

them in?'," says Dally.

Bringing them in means importing semen from an approved source and country. Carefully selected ewes from a phenotypically similar breed are artificially inseminated using laparoscopic surgery. Select F1s (first generation) are bred back to another ram from the breed. This continues with each generation until the sheep meet the breed standards. By this time a breed organization has usually become established. Dally has personally been involved in establishing several breed organizations. He was also a pioneer in laparoscopic AI for sheep in 1986.

"I had been in university research in California and saw the need for new breeds," says Dally. "People would call me, and I would go to where the breeds were and select rams."

The bureaucratic barriers, such as handling protocols and disease concerns, can be obstacles. Two years ago he inspected and selected 18 rams from different breeds in Europe. Semen from only 2 were ever imported due to a disease outbreak.

Changing uses for the breed can also affect availability. When Dally first imported semen for Gotlands, they were bred for garment pelts with finer fleece and tighter curls that fit the U.S. market for spinning wool. In recent years, the Swedes have bred for pelts with a broader curl and less fine fleece for the furniture market.

"We can select rams for growth rate and

consistent coloring, but then we will have to breed back in a finer fleece," says Dally. "It is part art and part science."

Dally can get as involved in the project as his clients wish, from selecting the ram and arranging for the semen to be imported to selecting the ewes, handling the breeding and advising through the entire process.

For those breeds that Super Sire already has semen for, selecting the ram is as simple as going to the online catalog and clicking on the breed. A photo of available rams appears with the cost per straw, ram identification, sire, dam, and a description.

However, just because you see the ram and breed you are interested in doesn't mean Dally will automatically sell it.

"I ask where they will raise them and if the area is environmentally suitable for the breed," says Dally. "Do they want a breed they can interact with? If so, you don't want a stand-offish breed."

Dally's wife and partner Joy sums up the



Bringing a new sheep breed into North America often means importing semen, says Super Sire Ltd. Ewes from a phenotypically similar breed are artificially inseminated using laparoscopic surgery.

company's approach. "It's not about selling semen," she says. "It is also about a good fit."

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