"Quick Fix" For Tarp Tie-Downs

By Heather Smith Thomas

We don't have a hay shed on our ranch, so we always cover our haystacks with tarps or big strips of durable black plastic, which will often last several years.

The biggest enemy of a tarp is the wind. Unless the tarp is tied down securely, it can whip the tarp around and tear holes in it, and even tear out the grommets. You need to create a reinforced "ear" to tie the tarp down with a rope or twine so it won't pull off in a strong wind. This little trick has revolutionized the way we cover haystacks.

The best way we've found to make an "ear" on black plastic is to wrap a small, smooth rock into the material and then tie the twine tightly around it. The rock creates a solid lump in the plastic that will hold the twine so it can't pull off.

To keep wind from getting in under the plastic, we tie it down in many places. With big round bales we like to make long rows of bales - usually 2 bales high - with enough space between the rows so we can tarp each row by itself without the rows touching each other. Putting a big tarp over multiple rows creates valleys between the rows which collect water and snow that creates big ice chunks when it freezes. That makes it difficult to remove the tarp when uncovering the bales for feeding.

To make an "ear" a small rock is wrapped into tarp, then twine is tied tightly around it. Rock creates a solid lump in the plastic that holds the twine so it can't pull off.

Black plastic is so slippery that it sometimes works better than canvas for shedding moisture and snow, and it heats up from the sun so any snow melts and runs off.

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Mirrors Mounted Outside Skid Loader

"After reading a story in FARM SHOW about installing new rear view mirrors on both sides of a skid loader (Vol. 39, No. 1), I was inspired to try the same idea on my Bobcat 742B. It has really helped my field of vision," says Russell Reay, Cuttingsville, Vt.

"I already had a pair of convex mirrors inside the cab, but I was frustrated because I couldn't see my skid loader's rear wheels."

He removed the mirrors and bolted each one onto a bracket he made from a length of 1/2-in. dia. steel rod. The bottom 3 in. of each rod is welded to a 3 by 4-in., 1/4-in. thick steel plate, which bolts onto the loader arm with two 3/8-in. bolts.

"The bolts fit into a 1/2-in. hole in a big gusset located just ahead of the loader arm's hydraulic lift cylinder. I thought that mounting the mirrors on the loader arms might cause them to vibrate, but it hasn't been a problem at all," says Reay. "I can't see a lot of real estate behind me, but I can certainly see if I'm one inch or one foot from disaster. I think mirrors mounted like this should be standard equipment on all skid loaders."

Convex mirrors are designed to mount on both sides of skid loader.

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Farmsite Redesigned After Devastating Storm Damage

By Lorn Manthey, Contributing Editor

Minnesota farm brothers Brian, Chris and Bruce Peterson couldn't believe their eyes when they ventured outside after a huge tornado lifted away from their Northfield farm in September, 2018. "Our farmsite was a tangled mass of metal from 15 grain bins, 2 grain legs, and 3 crushed sheds, along with a bent-over Harvestore silo and dozens of fallen trees," says Brian. "All of us wondered how we'd get through this, with harvest just around the corner, and the bigger issue, how we could ever rebuild."

As neighbors, friends and relatives rushed to provide help, Brian says "all of us decided that we'd rebuild with state-of-the-art facilities for ourselves, our sons and future generations, because farming is our livelihood."

Amazingly, most of the rubble was cleared away within 2 mos. and during that time the Petersons havested their crop, hauled it to an unused elevator 30 miles away, and laid down parameters for reconstruction. "Our old farmsite, machine sheds, and grain system had deficiencies and bottlenecks, so the clean slate we started with for rebuilding was definitely beneficial," says Brian. "We were able to build what we wanted from the ground up."

The Far Gaze Farms grain system, which had been on the northwest quadrant of their yard and close to a house and shop, was moved 500 ft. to the northeast so prevailing winds would blow beeswings from the dryer, dust from road traffic, and noise from system operations away from the yard rather than into it. "With the old system we had to vacuum beeswings almost every day and the dust was always a problem," says Bruce.

The grain handling system consists of three grain legs in a single tower, two 500,000 bu. bins, two 100,000 bu. bins, two wet grain hopper bins, a 10,000 bu. loadout, a double pit dump, and a certified scale with a control center.

"We went from a system that had been added onto several times to one that's built for double the unloading capacity and 50 percent more bin capacity with 6 fewer bins," Brian says. "The increased leg capacity lets us dump a semi in 5 min. while still being able to move grain from one bin to another, blend if we need to, and move grain from the dryer to storage or to the loadout. All bins except the loadout have temperature cables so we can monitor grain from a phone app."

The footprint also allows adding bin capacity without adding a grain leg.

Their grain dryer is 48 ft. long, 22 tiers tall, and rated for 6,300 bu. per hour, three times that of their old system. "We put larger motors on the fans and chose a dryer that we can expand if we need to," Brian says.

Three-phase power runs underground to the grain system control building, which has a PLC computerized management system. Motors throughout the system are sized for maximum capacity. "A video monitor on the PLC system shows the bins and legs with cups and drag chains moving grain so we always can see what's happening and where grain is going in the system," Brian says. The control building also has food prep that's especially helpful during harvest.

"Our old shop, office and equipment storage was cramped and inconvenient, so we spent a lot of time designing a multi-function and easily accessible building," Brian says. "It has offices on one side and an 80 by 150-ft. shop with 50 ft. of additional cold storage. The working space has a truck pit and a 40 by 80-ft. wash bay that can hold two semis or large machinery." The 20-ft. sidewalls, a 60-ft. wide door on one end, and three overhead side doors allow them to drive a combine in with a 45-ft. header, unfold a 36-row planter, or pull in semi trucks with trailers. Built on the old bin site, the pad was made with ground-up concrete from all the old bins. Additional equipment is stored in a new 72 by 144-ft. machine shed with multiple doors on one side.

Fuel and LP storage is located in a common area 150 ft. from the grain facility and easily accessible for filling or loadout without interferring with grain trucks. "During harvest we might have a dozen semis and 8 different fuel burning machines going at once, so it was important to have that system well thought out," says Brian.

Bruce Peterson says that in a way, the storm disaster really brought their families and neighbors together in a special bond. "We had tremendous help from more than 100 volunteers who brought manpower and equipment during cleanup. An excellent relationship with Agri-Systems, the grain system contractor, and with the contractors who built the sheds, kept those projects on schedule as we rebuilt. We were also able to do a lot of work ourselves with heavy equipment, trucks and manual labor."

Two years ago a tornado left this farmsite near Northfield, Minnesota, in a tangled mass of metal. Brothers Brian, Chris and Bruce Peterson decided to rebuild with state-of-the-art facilities.

Their new grain handling system consists of 3 grain legs in a single tower, two 500,000 bu. bins, two 100,000 bu. bins, two wet grain hopper bins, a 10,000 bu. loadout, a double pit dump, and a certified scale with a control center.

Almost a year after the storm, Far Gaze held an open house at the completed facilities to thank volunteers and work crews. A few days later the grain system was running hard as the 2019 harvest began. With a year of operation completed, the Petersons say they're extremely pleased with the new facilities.

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