



60-in. modified interseeder uses an electric seed meter and is controlled by a rheostat wired on the tractor.

They Harvest, Graze And Forage On The Same Acres

By Jim Ruen, Contributing Editor

Luke Bergler plants forage-worthy cover crops in between his 60-in. corn rows and gets two months of grazing after harvest. While neighbors strive for high yields,

Bergler strives for improved soil health, lower input costs, and a better bottom line.

"Last year, I had about 20 acres in 60-in. rows with a 15-way mix of cover crops interseeded early season," says Bergler.

"After harvest, I grazed my 50-head cow herd (with calves) on it for two months. That gave me a bonus over corn yields of around \$600 per acre in hay and mineral cost savings."

Bergler already averaged from 140 to 150 bushels per acre yield with his low input program. While neighboring farmers might harvest more than 200 bushels per acre, they also apply at least twice his 113 lbs. of nitrogen, all laid down at planting.

Bergler no-till plants his corn into a rye cover crop drilled into the previous year's soybean fields. His other input costs consist of one pass with herbicide to terminate the rye before interseeding. Cover crop interseeding runs about \$42 per acre.

Bergler planted his normal 31,000 seeds per acre but at twice the in-row population in the 60-in. rows. The switch from 30-in. rows required no new equipment. He simply shut off every other row on his planter.

Several years earlier, Bergler and his neighbor Mike Steinfeldt built their own interseeder for cover crops.

"We traded a load of cornstalk bales for a six-row rotary hoe, and we mounted a Gandy air seeder on it," says Bergler. "The seed meter was ground drive originally. We converted to a hydraulic motor and later to electric, which is handier. It lets us control seeding rates with a rheostat wired on the tractor."

With hoes removed for the corn rows, the hydraulic-powered fan delivers seed through hoses to deflectors. They drop the seed into lightly disturbed soil behind the hoes.

This year he will be doing 60-in. rows on around 40 acres. He expects to double the amount of stockpiled forage for grazing.

"With corn at \$7 or more, it's hard not to



Cover crop growing between 60-in. row corn.

go all-in on corn yields," says Bergler. "It's simple to plant into rye and hairy vetch and harvest more than 200 bushels of corn, even with reduced nitrogen. However, that stockpiled forage will be important, especially if we have a short hay crop."

Bergler sees multiple values in his corn/forage system beyond the yearly bottom line. It fits his overall soil health improvement goals and improves water infiltration.

Some benefits are harder to measure. "I was walking my 60-in. row fields last summer and wished I'd had a video camera with me," he recalls. "There were tens, if not hundreds, of thousands of dragonflies in the air."

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Cain built and used a self-propelled 24-ft. combination tiller/drill/packer. It was powered by three engines, including two flathead Cadillacs and an Allis-Chalmers.

Museum Houses Big Farmer's Custom-Built Equipment

Phyllis Carlson says that visitors to the Dawes County Historical Museum in Chadron, Neb., can time-travel through 140 years of agricultural history while looking at some of the most unusual farm implements ever invented.

"We have several buildings, including one that houses very rare equipment invented, built and used by Dawes County farmer Marcus Cain," Carlson says. After he retired from farming, Cain wanted his special machinery to be housed in a museum, and that finally occurred in 2016 when Dawes County built a special Cain Exhibit Building to store and interpret his inventions and those of other Nebraska farmers.

Marcus Cain was way ahead of his time in terms of the land he operated and the equipment he used. He farmed nearly 4,000 acres of potatoes and wheat in northwest Nebraska using machinery he built himself or modified. He improved existing implements to get more done and built others that solved labor, planting and harvesting issues.

The museum holds a 200-hp. tractor that Cain built in 1965 using the framework of a World War II tank retriever. Carlson says

he stripped off the heavy shielding to make it smaller and lighter but kept the original tracks. Like other equipment he built, the tractor is painted orange with his name on the cab.

Long before no-till farming was even thought of, Cain built a 20-ft. wide stubble chopper to lightly incorporate wheat stubble into the topsoil and provide a nice seedbed. Then, rather than till the soil and use a conventional grain drill, Cain built and used a self-propelled 24-ft. combination tiller/drill/packer. It was powered by three engines,

including two flathead Cadillacs and an Allis-Chalmers. The device incorporated two grain drills with a rototiller in front and rubber tires behind to gently firm the seedbed. He named it Marcine, after his daughter, and attached front and rear lights so he could work well into evening hours.

The museum also displays three of Cain's signature orange farm trucks. One has an oversized cooling system, and another is fitted with a fanning mill to clean grain. Cain dumped clean seed into a tank on the truck that incorporated a discharge auger he used to fill his seeder.

"Cain was a smart and inventive farmer who had machining and welding equipment on his farm," Carlson says. "He went to a couple of years of technical school, but mostly he learned from his father and built out his ideas by trial and error. He even had an oil and gas refinery on his farm."

Carlson says that Cain also built a self-propelled combine that was probably the first of its kind in the United States. Unfortunately, it was dismantled and sold for parts. Cain was offered jobs by several equipment manufacturers but always turned them down to remain on his farm.

The Dawes museum has hundreds of other artifacts in two log buildings, two schoolhouses, a blacksmith shop and an authentic railroad caboose. Call or check the museum website for viewing hours.

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Cain's custom-made 20-ft. stubble chopper.