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Bag it

Sep 1, 2009 12:00 PM, By Larry Stalcup

When you have a bin-busting crop, store the extra grain in a plastic bag

Whether You're overflowing with corn or beans in Iowa, wheat in Kansas or sorghum on the South Plains of Texas, heavy-duty plastic bags loaded right off the combine for indefinite storage can add storage capacity to your farm.

Users of the [Flexi-Grain Storage system from Richiger](#) are meeting emergency needs for instant storage space. They're able to keep those \$300,000-plus combines running and not setting in the field waiting for a truck to unload a grain cart. And they're not facing pressure to sell grain at harvest when prices are normally at their lowest. They're also able to save truck fuel by reducing the number of grain hauls to the elevator or a central on-farm bin.

For a cost of about \$50,000, a grower can purchase a grain-bagging machine and separate unloader. That equipment, along with a polyurethane bag, enables growers to store grain on the edge of any field with a large flat surface. A bag 9 ft. in diameter and 200 ft. long costs about \$600. A 10- x 250-ft. bag also is available.

"I use the system to store corn, wheat and milo at our Brazos County, TX, farm," says Ted Higginbottom, who also has a custom-farming service near Seminole, TX. "Our custom-farming operation provided storage last year for sorghum planted as a catch crop after cotton was hailed out."

Otis Johnson, also a Seminole grower, used the bagging system from Higginbottom's custom service to handle virtually every bushel of sorghum he grew after a cotton hail-out. He stored more than 14,000 bu. of grain from harvest in October until he marketed the milo in March.

"I put the grain up at about 13% moisture off the combine and it looked exactly the same when we unloaded the bags about five months later," Johnson says. "I bet we didn't waste 150 lbs. of grain when we unloaded it. We also didn't have to sell at harvest."

Rapid expansion

The Flexi-Grain Storage system is from Show-Me Shortline, a Centralia, MO, company. It is the U.S. distributor for the equipment's manufacturer, Richiger out of Argentina.

"They've had this system in Argentina about 15 years," says Show-Me Shortline president Chris Finck. "It was needed because of the rapid expansion in the grain industry in the mid 1990s. There was a shortage of grain storage and grain-handling facilities, requiring an innovative solution. Flexible grain storage using grain baggers took off from there."

Growers in the South became interested in the bagging system as they switched from cotton to corn along with soybeans. "There wasn't that much grain storage in that area because most acres were in cotton," Finck says. "The bagging system made economic sense. They needed a way to hold their grain and use their combines more efficiently."

The system basically includes a bagger/loader, plastic bags and an unloader. The Flexi-Grain baggers are an R-9 and larger R-10. They cost about \$20,000 or more. The EA-180 and EA-240 unloaders cost about \$30,000 or more.

A bag is a three-layer, co-extruded polyethylene tube. "A single 9-ft.-dia. by 200-ft.-long bag holds about 8,000 bu.," says George Cooper, a Show-Me Shortline rep.

How it works

Bags should be located on high ground with good drainage, away from trees and any objects that might break the bag. The surface should be level and smooth with no stones or sharp objects so the bag can lie firmly on the ground with little risk of suffering a puncture or rip. If necessary, the ground should be graded.

Bags are attached to the half-moon-shaped bagger, which is attached to a tractor. Grain from a grain cart or combine is augered into the bagger's container. It is then augered into the bag. As the grain is moved forward into the bag by the compression auger, it gradually pushes against the bag's walls. The bag in turn opposes resistance, and the appropriate balance of pressure and tension is attained by properly regulating brake action on the bagger.

With the tractor in neutral gear and the PTO engaged, the bagger slowly moves as the bag fills. Once full, the bag is sealed airtight with 2 x 4 boards bolted together. The seal keeps the well-packed grain dry until it is removed.

To remove the grain, the bag is unsealed and attached to the unloader. Grain is augered from the unloader onto typical semitrailer grain beds. It is at virtually the same moisture count as when it went into the bag, 13 to 14%, and it's free of insect damage or insect eggs, Finck says.

"The grain is oxygen free when the bag is sealed so it basically 'goes to sleep,'" he explains. "The system keeps insects out. Grain quality is maintained."

Higginbottom notes that once a bag has been emptied it can't be used for bagging again. "However, it can go for other uses, such as a cover for silage or hay," he says. It also could go to a plastic-recycling facility.

Johnson plans to use the system in his sorghum program. "From what we experienced with the grain we unloaded in March, I wouldn't be afraid to leave in there a year," he says.

Contact Show-Me Shortline Co., Dept. FIN, 20160 N. Hwy. 124, Centralia, MO 65240, 573/682-5514, visit www.flexigrainstorage.com or www.freeproductinfo.net/fin, or circle 101.

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