Low-Labor Way To Make Feed, Hay

Troy Overstreet uses this modified MC Matthews flail chopper strictly as a vacuum-blower. It delivers crop material into a 20-ft. long by 12-ft. high wagon.

"It saves a lot of labor all the way from harvest through feeding. It also eliminates a lot of equipment," says Troy Overstreet, a Florida cow-calf producer who has developed an efficient method of harvesting, storing and feeding hay. He says it's 50 percent less costly than conventional methods.

Overstreet uses a modified MC Matthews flail chopper, which was originally designed to cut green chop and blow it into a trailing wagon. It's equipped with flail blades that would normally not only cut the crop but also create a vacuum. A blower would then deliver the material into a trailing wagon.

However, Overstreet uses the machine strictly as a vacuum-blower. A conventional mower is used to cut the crop, which is then raked out evenly across the field for drying. Once the material is dry, he uses the flail chopper to vacuum the crop material and blow it into a home-built, weather-proof wagon that doubles as a feeder. A pair of squirrel cage fans, one on each side of the chopper's deflector chute, help in completely filling and packing the wagon.

The wagon is built on an old house trailer frame and has plywood sides and a metal roof. It measures 20 ft. long by 12 ft. high. There's a hinged, 2-ft. high metal lid on each side of the wagon at the bottom. To feed his livestock, Overstreet tows the wagon to the feeding site. Then he manually lifts the lids so the cattle can self-feed from the wagon. There's no further handling of the crop.

A hydraulic-operated, automatic ball hitch on back of the harvester allows easy wagon hook-up either by a tractor or pickup.

"It's a fast, easy system to use. Because the wagon is weather-proof, hay can remain inside the wagon for up to a year. And I only have to handle the crop once," says Overstreet. "I've been using this system for about 10 years and use a total of 10 home-built wagons. Generally I open two or three wagons at a time so cows don't crowd in too much. The wagons store enough feed to last my cattle all winter long. Each wagon holds about eight tons of feed. Cattle are able to reach in far enough that they clean up 99 percent of the feed. There's very little wasted feed. Some of my pastures are more than 20 miles apart so I often use a pickup to tow the wagons down the road. With the automatic hook-up, I never have to get off the tractor or pickup to hook up or disconnect the wagon.

"I use it with perennial peanuts, a premium quality hay that's grown along the Gulf Coast. Cattle love this feed, but it has a lot of leaves that get easily separated from the plant stem. The flail chopper's vacuum action picks up any separated leaves that would otherwise be lost. I also use it with rye grass. The wagon has an expanded metal floor which allows air to circulate up through the hay and keep it dry.

"I had been putting hay up in small square bales and, later on, round bales. But square bales required a lot of labor, and round bales had to be stored inside a barn to keep them from rotting."

Years ago, the Matthews flail chopper was used by farmers to green chop their hay, says Overstreet. "However, you don't see too many on farms any more. They're still used in the sod industry to mow grass off sod before it's harvested."

The flail chopper is only 5 ft. wide. "New Holland makes a flail chopper that's 8 ft. wide, which would work better because I could load a wagon faster," he says. "There's only a 4 or 5-in. high opening on front of the flail chopper so I can't pick the crop up in a windrow or it would bunch up."

Overstreet says the two squirrel cage blowers together put out about 800 cu. ft. per min. "I used these fans because I was able to get them cheap. It would probably work better to have a single, bigger fan with more blowing power.

He mounted a wooden nose cone on front of the wagon to keep feed from blowing away when turning at the end of the field. The cone also helps to keep rain out of the wagon.

He says he's working on developing an automatic lifting system for the wagon lids.

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Home-built, weather-proof wagon doubles as a feeder. There's a hinged, 2-ft. high metal lid on each side of wagon at bottom.

"Push Rod" System Straightens Basements

Settling soil or poor landscaping can cause any basement wall to buckle inward, and it can cost an arm and a leg to repair the damage. That's why Gary Resch and his son, Greg, came up with a new wall brace system that supports the wall and also pushes it back straight again.

"It offers a permanent solution at less cost than any other system on the market," says Gary.

The Gorilla Wall Brace can be used in any basement that has a concrete floor and exposed floor joists. It can even be used on spancrete ceilings or the newer truss floor joists with a little modification.

The system consists of a bracket that bolts to three floor joists, and a threaded pushing rod with a screw mechanism built into it. A 2 by 4 steel tube runs from the ceiling to the floor where a bracket holds it in place. Steel braces are spaced vertically every 4 ft. along the basement wall and remain permanently in place to stabilize the wall. The push rod bracket is designed to be operated by an air wrench to apply continuous pressure, moving the wall back over a period of time. After the wall is pushed back straight, the braces remain permanently, supporting the wall which can then be finished normally.

"It eliminates the stress and twist caused by other basement wall straightening systems. Unlike other systems, there's no need to dig up your yard, and it can be installed any time of the year," says Resch.

"What we're really doing is taking up nature's slack. When a wall buckles, the soil around the basement is usually wet so you aren't able to push the wall back but just hold it in place. Once the ground dries up and contracts, over a 2 to 5-year period of time, you can use the pushing rod to take up the slack and push the wall back all the way."

The floor-mounting bracket for the steel brace is designed to accept up to four anchor bolts in cases where a thin floor needs more holding power. The pushing rod bracket is available in two styles depending on whether you have crosswise or lengthwise (parallel or vertical) floor joists.

A number of dealers in the Midwest can install the system. An easy-to-install home installation kit is also available. It includes everything needed except for the steel brace, which the customer buys at their local steel yard. "The brace can be cut to the length you need for your basement walls," notes Resch.

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Threaded rod on joist bracket pushes out against wall brace.

"It offers a permanent solution at less cost than any other system on the market," says inventor Gary Resch.

3-Pt. Cone Spreader Gets Wheels

Carl Baldwin uses his 3-pt. mounted, cone-type Baltic spreader frequently to spread fertilizer. To make the unit easier to handle, he added a pair of wheels to it.

"Before I made the modification it was a pain to move the spreader after removing it from the tractor, and also to hook it back up to the tractor again," says Baldwin. "Now after I unhook the spreader, I can easily roll it out of the way into my shed and then get it out again to hook it back up to the tractor," he says.

To make the axle, he used a length of angle iron with a 3/4-in. dia. rod welded to each end of it. He mounted a small metal "foot" behind the wheels to hold it level when parked.

"The cone holds about 500 lbs. of commercial fertilizer. I also use the spreader to spread ground-up tobacco stalks on my pasture. The stalks are high in nitrogen and make great fertilizer. I use a pto-driven hammer mill to grind the stalks. I use the same tractor that drives the hammer mill to operate the spreader. The wheels let me roll the spreader under the mill's separator and fill it up. Then I can unhook the mill and quickly hook it up to the spreader," he notes.

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Carl Baldwin added a pair of wheels to his 3-pt. mounted, cone-type spreader, making the unit easier to handle.