

## Combine Baler Combo Harvests Two Crops At Once

The high-yielding wheat grown in the Palouse region of southeast Washington produces lots of straw. Now two farmers in the area have figured out how to harvest grain and straw at the same time.

"Our average wheat yield is 100 to 120 bu. per acre, and we get five tons of straw per acre, too," says Curtis Coombs. "We used to burn it, but that's getting harder and harder to do."

Coombs and a neighbor, Steve Shoun, tried baling behind the combine and then pelletizing the straw, but the pelletizer wouldn't work with dried straw. After hearing about how Australian wheat producer Graham Shields hooked a baler behind his combine, the two decided to try that approach.

"We talked to Graham and decided to try his Combaler Bale Direct System," says Coombs. "We had to fabricate a different hitch to match up with our hillside combines."

Coombs and Shoun connected a Hesston 4790 baler to their Case 8010H combine. To

achieve adequate traction, the combine has to also have auxiliary rear drive. The rear axle carries the tongue weight of the baler. All residue from the combine is funneled directly into the baler.

Coombs cautions that adding the baler complicates the grain harvest. "You have to realize you're harvesting two crops at the same time," he says. "When you're putting out a bale every 58 seconds, your grain carts and trucks can't just run alongside the combine unless you've got someone retrieving the bales to get them out of the way."

Not counting the handling equipment, Coombs says modifying and connecting the baler runs around \$50,000. That, of course, is in addition to the combine, baler and bale handling equipment.

"We ran it over about 1,000 acres last year," says Coombs. "While we are still modifying things, on the whole we had no issues with the baler. The great thing is that you can take as little or as much residue as you want by



Case 8010H combine pulls Hesston 4790 baler, harvesting grain and straw at same time. All residue from combine is funneled directly into the baler.

adjusting the height of the cut."

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Strauff Fiber LLC, 324 Lower Hogeeye Rd, Dayton,

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## They're Turning Straw Into Gold

Washington State wheat farmers Curtis Coombs and Steve Shoun have figured out how to sell straw and chaff from their wheat fields for up to \$200 a ton. Their secret? They pelletize it.

Their high-yield wheat fields produce four to five tons of residue per acre and they see it as a high value crop.

"By connecting a baler directly to the combine using the combaling system, we pick up all weed seeds, chaff, broken grain and straw," explains Coombs. "Adding the chaff, leaves and other residue to the straw makes it possible to pelletize it. We couldn't do this with wheat straw alone."

After having the contents of several bales custom-pelletized, Coombs and Shoun, along with two partners, started Strauff Fiber, LLC. They bought and modified a pelleting ma-

chine and began marketing wheat residue pellets for horse bedding.

Coombs says the pellets will absorb as much as 300 percent of their weight in moisture. They also decompose faster than wood shavings, which give them added value as compost or manure.

Other new marketing opportunities are appearing as people learn about the pellets. "We've had interest from the forest service in using them for erosion control," says Coombs. "They can drop them by air on exposed soil to create an erosion prevention mat. The pellets practically explode when exposed to moisture."

The bales produced behind the combine also have significant value as livestock feed. After testing nutrient value, several large cattle feeders have offered to buy all the bales

Coombs and Shoun can produce.

The two are also investigating the use of the pellets as fuel. Due to their compact nature and ease of transport and handling, many other uses are also being considered. Coombs says the two haven't had time to even look into adding grass seed or fertilizer to the pellets.

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"Adding chaff, leaves and other residue to straw allows us to pelletize it," say Curtis Coombs and Steve Shoun.



## Silage Rake Has No Moving Parts

"Silage facers have always been a weak equipment link for us," says one of the owners of Riverview Dairy in Morris, Minn. "So after a history of using mechanical facers where bearings quickly wore out, chains broke, sprockets failed and hydraulic oil leaked all over our loaders, we decided to build our own rig."

To solve the problem, Riverview came up with a custom-built silage facing tool they call the Easy Rake. The device works so well they decided to patent it and build it for commercial sale because so many dairies and feedlots inquired about it.

The Easy Rake is available in 12-ft. or 16-ft. wide versions that mount on the front of an industrial loader tractor. It has 2-ft. long spear-like teeth mounted about 14 in. apart across the front frame. The side frames are supported with tubular cross members. The rear of the Easy Rake has a rugged box frame and brackets rigged just like those on a quick-tach bucket. This allows the operator to rake

silage from a stack and quickly switch to a bucket or grapple fork for loading.

Operators say the best aspect of the Easy Rake is that there are no moving parts, no hydraulic hoses, no chains and no sprockets. It's easy to operate and virtually maintenance-free. To use the Easy Rake, the loader driver simply lifts the teeth above the top of the silage pile and uses down pressure from the loader arms to drag the teeth through the packed silage. The Easy Rake doesn't plug in any type of silage, nor does it cut the silage into smaller pieces, which some mechanical models do. It works equally well in the winter or summer, in hay silage or corn silage, and it doesn't matter if the silage is wet, dry or frozen, according to Riverview Dairy.

Contact FARM SHOW followup, Riverview Dairy, 26406 470<sup>th</sup> Ave., Morris, Minn. 56267 (ph 320 760-5092; info@easyrakefacer.com; www.easyrakefacer.com).



Heavy-duty silage rake is available in 12 or 16-ft. wide versions that mount on front of an industrial loader tractor. The 2-ft. long spear-like teeth are spaced 14 in. apart.



Operator rakes silage from stack and then quickly switches to a bucket or grapple fork for loading.

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