

# Chopper-Roller Crushes Corn Stubble, Smooths Field

By Lorn Manthey, Contributing Editor

Most cornheads produced in the past few years have chopping knives that devour stalks and save a trip across the field with a conventional stalk chopper. George and Dale Hallcock, father and son farmers near Randolph, Minn., like the concept of fewer trips, but they don't like harvested fields with root ridges and sharp corn stubble that can puncture tires. Their solution is simple, although it requires an extra trip behind the combine before tillage.

"We pull a field roller behind a stalk chopper," says George Hallcock. "We run the chopper about 4 in. from the ground so we miss any small rocks, then the roller smashes and flattens the sharp stubble and the root berm, presses the residue to the ground and creates a smooth surface for fall tillage."

The Hallcocks till their fall corn ground using a large double disk that works the residue evenly with soil to a depth of about 5 in. Some residue remains on the surface, but it's held in place with soil.



George and Dale Hallcock pull the 20-ft. center section from a Rite-Way roller behind their Woods stalk chopper. The roller smashes and flattens sharp stubble, and creates a smooth surface for fall tillage.

Dale Hallcock says when he drives diagonally across the rolled stalks pulling the disk the field is as smooth as a road. The level surface allows the disk to penetrate at an even depth and thoroughly blend residue with the soil. When they plant corn on corn, there's less surface residue for the young corn plants to contend with.

The Hallcock's home-built design has a 20-

ft. wide Woods stalk chopper pulling a 20-ft. center section from a Rite-Way roller. A local machine shop built a sturdy hitch on back of the chopper and extended the roller hitch to allow easier turning. Hydraulic cylinders raise and lower the roller wheels and rotate the drum so the unit is just 8 ft. wide for road travel. Hydraulic hoses rest in cradles on top of the chopper and the hitch to the center of

the drum.

The Hallcocks say that even though the roller weighs close to 4 tons, their chopper tractor has no trouble pulling it at 5 to 6 mph and they hardly notice it's there.

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## He Raises Chickens Without Buying Feed

By Brad Miller

Karl Hammer, owner of Vermont Compost in Montpelier, Vermont, has been raising hundreds of chickens and collecting thousands of eggs for more than 18 years without buying any kind of chicken feed. He simply lets them feed on the piles of compost at his commercial composting operation.

It all started when a friend who owned a local restaurant needed a place to get rid of food waste. Since the city wouldn't allow the restaurant to have its own composting bin, the owner asked Karl if he would take the material. Karl noticed that his chickens were naturally attracted to the food waste.

Karl soon bought a couple hundred chickens and expanded the collection of garbage to other local businesses. The process is simple. The combined ration is placed in windrows inside simple high tunnels for the layer flock to forage on for feed. The tunnels allow the chickens to feed on warm windrows year-round. Chickens tumble and agitate the compost searching for bugs, grubs, and bits of food to feed on - all the while depositing their own protein droppings.

Karl's main motivations were to not only produce eggs from "garbage" but also to increase the quality of his compost by the addition of the chicken manure and to protect the value of the chicken itself. Karl believes the chickens are healthier, live longer, and produce larger, better quality eggs than most commercially raised chickens.

Since Karl's chickens get a wide variety of nutrients from the compost piles, which include all manner of fruit and vegetable waste along with worms, bugs and even mushroom mycelium, he is finding that his chickens are laying eggs farther into their lifecycle than would be normal.

Karl states that he has a very loyal customer base and that they prefer the taste of his bird's eggs compared to store-bought and even other producer's eggs. Karl's eggs are in high demand and sell for about \$4 per dozen. He



Karl Hammer doesn't buy any kind of feed for his chickens. Instead, he lets them feed on the piles of compost at his commercial composting operation.

is quick to note that raising chickens this way is not a way to get rich quick and you would also need to consider the impact on your neighbors of large compost piles.

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He gets food waste from a friend who owns a local restaurant, and from other local businesses.

