

He Composts Dead Stock In Concrete Mixer

Marty Winchell uses an old concrete mixer to compost dead animals on his mixed livestock farm in Alberta. The concrete mixer makes a great composter for several reasons but one of the most important is that the steel exterior and raised opening keeps wolves, coyotes, bears and cougars out.

"We used to compost dead animals in windrows, but that attracted predators," notes Winchell.

He raises cattle, sheep, pigs and chickens, selling the eggs and meat locally. There is no market for spent laying hens so they are killed. Normally, he would have to pay a rendering truck to haul them away, as with other livestock that die naturally.

He wasn't the only one with the problem, so Bear Smart, an Alberta provincial program, gave him a \$2,000 grant to try his idea.

"With the grant, I bought a cement mixer with a bad hydraulic drive and no truck," he says. "It cost me \$1,000 to transport it here and around \$800 for a new hydraulic drive, plus I had to buy some hoses. I figure I've got about \$2,000 of my own money in it."

What he got for the money was a simple and more than adequate composter. The entrance to the mixing barrel is easy to load

with any carcass the size of a large ewe or smaller. Winchell simply adds sawdust or straw and connects the hydraulic drive to his tractor or skid steer hydraulics.

"I spin it a few times and then turn it again in a few weeks," he says. "If I have time, I'll hook it up and spin it occasionally."

Winchell knows if he ran it more often and watched temperature and moisture more carefully, material would compost more quickly. As it is, it requires very little attention and gets the job done.

"If it looks too dry, I add water, or if it starts to smell a bit, I add straw or sawdust," he says. "As long as it is heating, I assume it is working. When it is ready, I just spin it the other direction, and the compost empties out."

Winchell suggests a similar rig would be ideal for a broiler operation where mortality tends to mount toward the end of the growth cycle. "You could put them in and spin them, and by the time the next flock was maturing, the compost would be finished."

One thing he likes is that he has had no complaints from neighbors.

"I'm surrounded by acreages on 3 sides and the river on the fourth," he says. "You have



Entrance to mixing barrel is easy to load with any carcass the size of a large ewe or smaller. Winchell adds sawdust or straw and moisture.

to be a good neighbor. This helps."

He thinks the idea will work for any livestock producer. "If you check around, you'll find a mixer on its truck for around \$2,000. Instead of paying to transport the mixer home, you can drive it and then sell the truck."

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Marty Winchell bought a cement mixer with no truck. He drives it with a new hydraulic drive that hooks up to the hydraulics on his tractor.



Buncher on back of combine is used to collect straw and chaff, which falls on buncher's steel fingers. As pile builds, buncher's back end gradually tilts to the ground.

He Bunches Crop Residue For Winter Grazing

When the snow flies, Steve Kenyon moves his cattle from grass pastures to nearby harvested fields to graze crop residue. Thanks to bunchers on the back of his combines, piles of forage are easy to find even in heavy snow. He uses swath grazing, moving a cross fence daily to control his herd's access to the piles.

"I prefer bale grazing, but with hay at 10 cents per pound, it's not an option," says Kenyon, a custom grazer/feeder in Alberta. "The recent drought sent hay through the roof."

Kenyon worked out a deal to graze a neighbor's pea straw and chaff. In the past he has done the same with oat or barley straw and chaff using a commercial buncher hooked to the back of a combine. Instead of spreading the straw, the bulk of the straw and chaff falls on the buncher's steel rod fingers.

As the weight of the pile builds, the back end of the loaded buncher gradually tilts to the ground. In most crops, the stubble sticking up through the fingers pulls the pile of bunched chaff and straw off. That didn't work with the peas.

"There isn't enough pea stubble to pull the pile off," says Kenyon. "In addition, the pea vines intertwine with what is still in the combine. We didn't get clean breaks between the piles."

Two days later, Kenyon had a solution. It was a ground driven, 2-wheel cart that hooked to the back of the combine. The chain drive is connected to a 2-sided platform made from an old, plastic water trough. With forward motion, chaff and straw were continually collected and dumped in small piles.

"We reversed the ground drive so the platform tipped forward to dump," says Kenyon. "As it spun forward, it ripped the intertwined vines apart."

While his quick design worked, the piles were half the size of the commercial buncher. Kenyon is now working on slowing the rotation so more material is gathered between dumps.

The neighboring farmer likes it too. Crop residue is cycled through the cow, leaving manure behind to feed next year's crop. Plans now are to underseed next year's crop with white clover or another cover crop to provide more protein and energy with the residue for swath grazing in the winter.

"This year we are feeding pellets of sprouts from malted grain," he says. "The sprouts fall off before the grain is roasted. The pellets are high in protein and energy. We tested the pea straw for feed value and are supplementing with the pellets."



Stubble sticking up through fingers pulls the pile of bunched chaff and straw off. But that didn't work with peas, so instead Kenyon uses a ground-driven, 2-wheeled cart.



He moves a cross fence daily to control herd's access to piles.

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