One of the biggest problems farmers face in using grain drills to plant soybeans and small grains is getting the drill set at the right seed population. Ken Von Muenster of Anamosa, Iowa, says he solved the problem by mounting four electronic weigh scales on his Deere 750 drill. He put one weigh unit under each corner of the hopper.

“It lets me know how much seed is left in the grain tank at all times and is about 99.5% accurate in setting seeds per acre,” says Von Muenster. “Conventional population monitors are only 80 to 90% accurate when used with beans.”

The scale kit has a capacity of 10,000 lbs. and operates off the tractor’s 12-volt battery. The kit consists of four 1 1/2-in. dia. load cells, electric wiring, and two digital readouts - one mounted in the tractor cab and one on the drill. Von Muenster used 2-in. sq. steel tubing, 1/2 by 1 1/2-in. flat steel, and 6-in. channel iron to make brackets to bolt the cells onto the drill frame under each corner of the tank. He raised the tank about 1 in. to put the weight on the load cells. He didn’t have to drill any holes on the drill.

“It gives me peace of mind when planting because I know that I’m not over or under planting,” says Von Muenster. “To calibrate the drill I check the weigh scale after planting three or four acres and then check the reading against my acre counter. For example, a reading of 4.11 acres on the acre counter and 375 lbs. on the scale means I’ve planted 91.24 lbs. of seed per acre. If I want to drill 85 lbs. per acre, I simply set the drill sprockets down 6 lbs.

“It’s highly accurate. I tested it on 100 units of soybeans last spring and found that it was off only .2 tenths of a unit.”

“I paid $1,500 for the scale units and spent about $175 on the mounting brackets for a total cost of $1,675, including my labor. I do some custom planting of beans with bulk seed and I think it’ll pay for itself in seed savings in only one year. If I plant 10% over desired population I’m spending an extra $2.50 per acre on seed. On 500 acres the cost savings is $1,250. Another advantage is that it lets me finish up a job for a customer without having to use small bags. I can keep planting after business hours at night when the truck scales in town aren’t open and I can’t weigh my bulk tender. The scale read-out has a backlight for night weighing. Also, not having to go back and check the level of seed in the drill eliminates the chance of slipping and getting hurt while getting on or off the drill.”

Von Muenster plans to market a do-it-yourself kit. Sells for $1,695 to fit a Deere drill. Kits will also be available for other models. He has already installed one on a Case-III drill and is working on a Great Plains. He expects the weigh system to work as well with wheat and other small grains.

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A new loader designed for rubber-tracked Caterpillar tractors lets you get more use out of the innovative and highly maneuverable tracked rigs, says Nebraska Machinery Co., Doniphan, Neb., a Caterpillar dealer that recently began offering modified Leon front-end loaders to fit Challenger 35, 45, and 55 row crop tractors.

At the recent Husker Harvest Days, the dealer displayed a Caterpillar 45 equipped with a Leon loader and grapple fork holding a single bale. It also had a 3-pt. spear holding two bales. The three 6-ft. high bales weighed 1,500 lbs. apiece.

“Chopper shown mounted on Deere 566 round baler. Note storage tube for extra twine and silage wrap, a product that is also manufactured by Heartland."