

Yield saver

Invention increases yield by shielding the crop as it leaves the header

By Dee Goerge

It always perturbed Herald Barton to watch ears of corn fly off into the field instead of into the combine. In 1991, frustration turned to determination when a bad corn borer infestation weakened ears at the shank and sent more corn flying than usual. Barton, of Silver Lake, Minnesota, went to a local blacksmith to create shields for the sides of his combine's header.

They worked.

The first metal shield stood straight up and bolted onto the body of John Deere corn headers. Later, Barton refined his design and had more shields made out of poly. Most are slanted and bolt to the snout of the corn head. Some models wrap around heads. The shields are tall enough to be higher than the corn on the stalks.

MARKETING AN IDEA

In 2006, Barton met with Carrie Mages, head of sales and marketing for May Wes Manufacturing, Inc., to talk about marketing his product.

"I understood immediately what it did and why it was going to work," says Mages. "He has a great concept."

The company eventually purchased Barton's Corn Shield patent and sells the invention today.



Photograph: Terry Davis

Herald Barton, Silver Lake, Minnesota, invented the Corn Shield after being frustrated when his corn would fall into the field instead of into the combine.

The shields direct cornstalks into the head's cutting bar, preventing ears from falling outside the head. While there are other shields on the market, Barton says they don't work as well because of poor placement. Correct placement is important, he notes, to contain the ears of corn on the end rows, which are the ones most likely to be lost.

Based on years of combine experience, counting lost ears, and making calculations, Barton says about nine ½-pound ears are lost per acre when conditions are good. More are lost at higher speeds and in less-than-ideal conditions.

With corn prices as high as \$4 per bushel in the last year, the loss per acres adds up quickly. "It doesn't take long to pay for the \$300 to \$400 (per set) shields," says Mages.

Mages notes that ear bounce can be a problem with low-cutting poly points. The shields send bouncing ears back to the gathering chains "for more grain in the tank and money in the bank." They are ideal for corn heads with stalk choppers.

Corn growers who purchase the shields often consider it as an investment for harvesting downed corn, says Mages. He thinks they don't always fully appreciate how much corn they save in normal conditions. The shields save sunflowers, too.

"It took 15 years of persistence," Barton says. "My kids always said, 'If the corn can be saved, Dad can figure out a way to save it.'" ■



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