

Crop Storage Institute

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NEWS RELEASE TOWER SILO INDUSTRY DISCUSSES MOVES INTO THE FUTURE

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For Immediate Release

Green Bay, WI--The International Silo Association (ISA) is taking steps to continue to meet the demands of growing livestock and dairy operations. Over the last few weeks the International Silo Association has been meeting with producers as well as silo manufacturers located across the Great Lakes States, Midwest, and Northeast.

The issues that arose were climbing the heights of the silos, limited capacity, dirty chutes, slow unloading, slow filling, and large capital investment. The ISA doesn't see these concerns as anything new, but some of the suggested solutions were quite revolutionary.

In response to complaints about climbing the structures one attendee suggested, "Why don't you create a low cost elevator?" Representatives were present from the two foremost silo equipment suppliers, DeMuth Steel Products and Lancaster Level-Flo. They informed the group that this advance is currently being used sporadically in Canada with some success. However, Canada is a much better market for this development because the relaxed agricultural safety laws in that country allow for production at a much lower cost. The elevator has yet to be employed in the United States because U.S. regulations make it cost prohibitive. However, members of the ISA Board of Directors noted the comments and will be looking into the issues with government safety boards.

With the continuous growth of farming operations, the ability to store large quantities of feed has become a growing issue. Over the past several years the silo industry has made efforts to meet this demand. The primary response has been the use of 30-foot diameter silos. At a height of over 130 feet, these silos have capacities nearing 3000 tons of forage. Bob Francois, sales manager with Sollenberger Silo of Chambersburg, PA, says, "The development has allowed the industry to serve the larger feeding operations. We're currently working on a beef feed lot project with thousands of animals."

Growth in the size of the tower means there must be growth in the size of the unloader. Here the industry has developed the center discharge unloader, a solution that "kills three birds with one stone. It unloads from the big silos (20, 24, and 30-foot diameters), unloads with amazing speed, and keeps the chute clean" states Carl Shefchik, co-owner of Shefchik Silo in Luxemburg, WI. The industry is working to meet the growing unloading needs through several avenues, but the center discharge unloader seems to be the most prominent development.

According to ISA, many producers who have used the unloaders have recorded unloading over 1500 pounds of forage per minute. This comes as a complete revolution in an industry that has long struggled with slow unloading. Because it unloads from the top down through a tunnel in the forage instead of down the chute, the chute remains clear of forage. Dirty chutes have long been a major complaint about towers, but this development leaves the chute clean for climbing. The center discharge unloader also eliminates the need for changing the doors as the feed level goes lower. Users of this product often report not climbing the silo for months at a time.

In addressing the concern of slow filling, Ken Musser of Lancaster Level-Flo in Mount Joy, PA says, "Throughout the Lancaster County area custom harvesters are consistently filling tower silos at over 100 tons per hour." Producer Jeremy Zirbel also notes, "When we were filling our tower, we were emptying 10 ton wagons in under 5 minutes." ISA notes that the effort of forage blower companies has made a large difference in this area. "The 10-inch filling pipe was once thought a bottle neck in the process, but that no longer seems to be true", comments Darrel LaPlough of Tri-State Silo in Riverdale, MI.

ISA went on to cite a bunker density study by the University of Wisconsin in which they recorded densities and packing methods in 168 different bunkers throughout Wisconsin. The spreadsheet created in conjunction with the study shows that using packing guidelines set out by the University of Wisconsin, it is extremely difficult to properly pack more than 60 tons of forage per hour in a bunker.

The capital cost of the tower silo was a concern that was raised in every region of the country. According to ISA members, this is not something that they could not address directly. However, the members did make a couple of general points. 1) The tower silo provides strong economic benefit in that the tower has less dry matter shrink than any other forage storage method, including silage bags. This can save the producer thousands of dollars per year. 2) The tower silo is a permanent investment with few recurring costs. Whereas with horizontal methods, the producer needs to buy plastic year after year. 3) Running the electric motor of the unloader as opposed to running the engine of a tractor or skid loader can represent savings of thousands of dollars per year.

ISA will be continuing this conversation across the dairyland. If you have any comments that you would like to contribute. Please contact the ISA office at (630) 258-7206 or by email at: cropstorage@cs.com.