

Self-Adjusting Deck Plates Mean More Grain In Bin

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More and more farmers in the Midwest are switching to European-type corn heads on their American-made combines. The reason? Many like the stalk-chopper attachment that isn't available on U.S. products.

Olimac, an Italian firm, manufactures the Drago corn head and it's the number one seller in Europe. Designed to harvest more yield, the Drago has a stalk chopper option and self-adjusting non-hydraulic deck plates on each row. American made corn heads have hydraulic deck plates that must be controlled by the combine driver. Drago's automatic adjustment is made by a spring loaded piston on each row that moves the deck plate according to the width of stalks that enter. It's a simple yet effective design.

Another reason for the switch to European made corn heads is the rapid change in corn genetics that provide drier corn at harvest. However, drier corn means the kernels are more likely to shell off the cob with potential for loss at the header. Drago's header handles the corn gently, causing less kernels to fall from the cob.

Research shows that for each one-eighth inch of misadjustment on a hydraulic deck plate, there is a three- or four-bushel-per-acre difference in the actual harvest. With adjustments coming from the combine cab, it's impossible to see such minor adjustments. Drago's automatic adjustment according to each stalk's width means more efficiency and less loss of grain. Each row is constantly adjusting itself as the combine moves through the field.

One Iowa farmer is convinced that this Italian built corn head will change the design of corn heads built here in the United States. Dennis Bollig visited Europe six years ago to view the corn harvesting equipment. A farmer for 31 years, he also has worked with farm equipment manufacturers as a consultant on prototype machines.

While overseas, he saw the number one corn harvester in Europe with a corn head made by Olimac. A family-owned firm, Olimac has fo-

cused on the design and manufacturing of corn harvesters for 50 years.

Lorenzo Carboni, son of the owner of Olimac Co. that manufactures Drago headers, is a design engineer for the family business. He traveled from Italy to Iowa and Minnesota recently to visit with farmers about the header and evaluate its performance. According to Carboni, Olimac built the first stalk-chopping corn head in 1964, and from the beginning the focus was on yield first, chopping second.

"You can add a chopper to a corn head, the challenge is it must be designed right," he said.

The corn head's first and most important job is to harvest all the yield. The self-adjusting deck plates of the Drago eliminates waste. Gentle handling of the corn through the corn head prevents the drier kernels of today's corn from dropping off into the field.

Bollig said he was pleased at how gently his Drago corn head handled the corn when he brought his first Drago corn head to Iowa five years ago. Other farmers tried the head and they agreed. They saw less corn on the ground.

Today, with high energy costs for drying corn, farmers like to let corn remain in the field longer to dry naturally. Improved plant genetics are providing not only good yields, but drier corn at harvest. However, the drier the corn, the more need there is to handle it gently. That is where the Drago corn head really shines.

"If you want to reduce shelling of corn at the header, you must reduce the velocity of the ear as it hits the deck plate," says Bollig. "The slower the ear hits the plate, the less kernels you knock off the cob. You'll have less shelling loss."

When a better header saves as much as one or two bushels per acre, it pays for itself in a short time.

Suppose a corn-saving head were run over 20,000 acres. At just one bushel per acre that would be 20,000 bushels. That amount times \$2 per bushel would be \$40,000., a healthy amount to apply towards better equipment. Δ

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