

harvest crew, just to move the crop to storage or market.”

Today, whether it's wheat, milo (grain sorghum) or corn grown on the nearly 12,000 acres the Doll brothers farm north and east of Garden City, Kansas, the majority of the crop goes into specially designed grain bags stretched out on the ends of the fields. That allows Jesse, Matt and crew to spend their time harvesting when time is at a premium and to move the crop to market when things slow down.

The bags save money in other ways, too, including storage costs. “Permanent grain bins are expensive,” adds Matt Doll. “You can generally figure on at least four dollars per bushel in capital investment. When you figure the cost for bags last year came out to about 5 3/4 cents per bushel, grain bins don't seem to pencil out as well.”

According to Jesse, most of their initial education on grain bagging came at a time when the industry was still in its infancy. Hence, they relied heavily on another Kansas farmer named Scott Schertz, who began putting grain in bags around Oakley, Kansas, as early as 2003.

“When he started, it was difficult to even find grain bags



available in the United States,” Jesse relates. “So, Scott was using silage bags, which proved to be rather fragile. When grain bags came along, it changed everything.”

“Scott is the guy who figured it all out around here. We still give him a call if we have a question or problem,” Jesse relates. “About the only problems we have now are with deer and raccoons,” he adds. “The best defense we've found is to put an electric fence wire around the ends of the bags and then tie rags to the fence that have been soaked in diesel fuel,” he explains. “We don't even have to put a charger on the fence. The deer around here know about electric fence wire and generally stay away.”

“We did have hail on some of the bags last year, which made a few small holes,” Jesse adds. “But a \$3 tube of acrylic caulking goes a long way in sealing those up.”

As for grain spoilage in the bags, Doll says he has never seen it, even when milo was put in the bags at 16 to 17 percent moisture. “We try to put grain into the bags in the type of condition we would want it to be in when we sell it,” he explains. “In our experience, it comes out at the same moisture and color that it went in. So if it's too wet to go to market when we put it in the bag, it's too wet when it comes out.”

The Dolls insist the bags are also a better option than storing milo on the ground while it waits for transport to one of three ethanol plants within an 80-mile radius. “We may not do everything in a conventional manner,” Jesse continues, “but putting grain in bags has certainly helped the bottom line. As I've always said,” he concludes with a broad smile, “we must be making money, because every year, I always end up paying income tax.” ■

Proponents of grain bagging—which originated in South America—claim it offers a number of benefits.

- ▶ Grain can be transported to market when it's convenient.
- ▶ Storage space is virtually unlimited.
- ▶ Permanent storage, which can tie up operating capital, can be eliminated or reduced.
- ▶ There are no property taxes on the grain bag system or bags.
- ▶ Grain can be easily classified by tagging or marking the bags.
- ▶ Bags are ideal for isolating and storing organic commodities.
- ▶ The oxygen-poor, carbon dioxide-rich environment within the bags virtually ensures the absence of insects, microorganisms and fungus, eliminating any need for fumigants, reducing material costs, labor and exposure to toxins.
- ▶ Harvest isn't delayed waiting for storage to become available.
- ▶ The producer has more time to market, as well as gain better control of commodity price.