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Don Larson demonstrates how the SwingSpear attachment for tractors and loaders efficiently manages hay bales on his farm in Fruitland.

Attachment helps farmer save time handling hay

By **MATTHEW WEAVER**
Capital Press

FRUITLAND, Wash. — Normally, when a hay farmer picks up two hay bales in the field, it is a multi-step process.

First, he has to pick up one bale and place it beside the other. Then he has to reverse the tractor, drive it into position and spear both bales to put them on a stack.

Fruitland-farmer Don Larson thought it could be done more efficiently.

“I was just tired of all the jockeying of the equipment in the field to get the bales collected,” he said.

That’s when he developed SwingSpear, a hydraulic attachment that pivots in the middle, allowing him to pick up the first bale and drive to the second. He then swings the first bale up and out of the way, allowing him to spear the second without stopping, backing up or repositioning the tractor.

“You’re in forward motion the whole time you’re gathering hay bales in the field,” Larson said.

Larson has been haying for five seasons. In the spring of 2020, he and a co-worker discussed finding a way to move the first bale out of the way to get to the second.

Larson made a small cardboard model, which looked like it would work. He drew on the shop floor with chalk and started cutting pieces and welding them together. He then attached the first SwingSpear to his tractor.

Larson contacted a college friend, Chris Henjum, president of Hydrafab Northwest in Spokane Valley. His engineers then manufactured Larson’s official prototype.

“Lean farming — the faster someone can load a truck, get things out of the field and burn less fuel, the better off they are,” Henjum said. “Don’s an in-the-trenches kind of owner, designer and developer. He’s going to get in there, turn a wrench and also add value on design and ideas.”

Larson has 10 SwingSpears available for sale that fit various tractor models. He has applied for a patent.

Larson conducted time trials loading hay bales. He estimates the device provides a good savings and the ability to pick up 25% more hay in the same amount of time compared to using the old method.

“The thing with the forward and reversing of the tractor, you’re clutching, you’re steering, the operator is turning his head and looking around to make sure he doesn’t back over someone or something,” he said. “Continually driving forward and picking

up hay is so much safer. And it does increase the amount of hay you can pick up in a day.”

Larson works as a logger in the fall and winter and farms during haying season. He purchased the farm in 2015 and is the third generation farming on the property.

“I would just like to have a happy retirement,” he said of developing SwingSpear.

SwingSpear is designed for 5-foot diameter bales. Larson hopes to design a model for 6-foot diameter bales for markets in the Midwest.

Family friend John Jensen, a retired Fruitland farmer, wasn’t surprised that Larson came up with the attachment. He cites Larson’s phenomenal meticulousness with equipment maintenance.

“You take that same person, that same brain, and you have that person design an implement for a tractor, and what do you have?” he said. “You have an extremely well-built, extremely durable piece of equipment. This thing’s for real. It’s built to last generations.”

Jensen helps Larson with haying and logging. He believes the tool will save farmers time, fuel and wear and tear on their equipment.

“I drive the truck in the field,” he said. “I was just absolutely blown away at how much faster it was.”

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