

Combine Header Equipment Options for Downed Grain Sorghum—2014

Compiled by Calvin Trostle, Ph.D, Professor & Extension Agronomist, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, Lubbock, TX (806) 746-6101, ctrostle@ag.tamu.edu

The winds that occurred on November 23, 2014 laid much of the region's grain sorghum crop on the ground. I will discuss in another note the factors that I and others think may have led to the collapse of the sorghum stalks just above individual nodes in the lower stalk, causing the stalk to fold over. (In brief, the environmental conditions the 2014 sorghum crop has experienced included: 9 days of cool, rainy, and cloudy weather in September; significant sucker heading on some fields, which may have weakened the stalks; and for much of the region's grain sorghum crop, especially in the central and lower South Plains, a harsh abrupt freeze occurred beginning November 11 lasting for about 3 days. Stalks particularly of later sorghum appeared to be high in moisture and suffered extensive freeze damage to lower stalk tissues.)

Equipment Options

John Deere

Dealers have their own lifters, most are yellow like you see in Fig. 1. If John Deere dealers are sold out temporarily they should be able to have more in from Illinois in 2-3 days according to one dealer. The ones I have seen were stamped "Made in Germany."



Fig. 1. Fingers, or lifters, that are available from most John Deere dealers for harvesting downed grain sorghum. Not all look exactly the same (or might be painted a different color).



Fig. 2. Fingers from John Deere being used in downed grain sorghum, north of Levelland, Nov. 26, 2014. The farmer is harvesting all rows from east to west as the sorghum is mostly lying down to the east or southeast. This greatly improves the harvesting as driving west-to-east, much of the sorghum otherwise slips under the header. This particular reel has flat batts, which don't help much in bringing the downed grain sorghum onto the header. This combine is traveling about 3 mph in this field though some producers have reported driving as slow as 1.5 mph due to heavy moisture lower stalks that run the risk of plugging the header or the internal threshing mechanism.

Growers with John Deere headers (and likely Case IH, Massey, others) also note that they are having improved success by using a reel that instead of flat batts (like in Fig. 2) has fingers (teeth) on the reel batts, which act more like a rake, and help pull the downed sorghum, once lifted by the fingers, onto the platform. The tips of the fingers on a reel like this actually can extend just below the top side of the lifter to pull the sorghum stalks into the header (Fig. 3). According to John Deere dealer staff, these can be added to batt reels if needed (I believe replaces the batts).

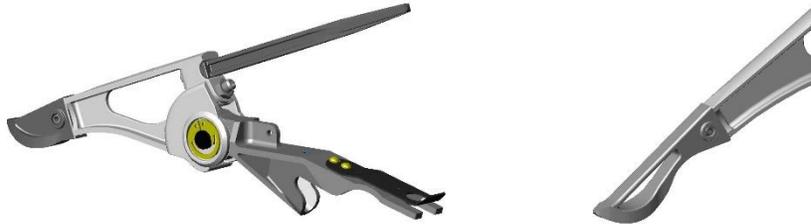


Fig. 3. Note the teeth from the reel batts just above this different version of FlexxiFinger cutter bar attachments. The reel can be lowered enough to rake into the downed sorghum and pulled onto the header, reducing some grain losses at the cutter bar.

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FlexxiFinger

Many Case IH dealers are using FlexxiFinger, Assiniboia, Saskatchewan, www.flexxifinger.com, 306-642-4555 (Ron Wheeler is a rep that is currently here helping install equipment, U.S. cell 406-783.7791 r.wheeler@flexxifinger.com). Wiley Implement, Lubbock, 806.745.4451 (Jayson Dunn, parts), is stocking these fingers. For the Lubbock area FlexxiFinger is recommending the 200 FlexxiFloat Arm model (Fig. 4) with the 20235 Shoe (the lower left tip, Fig. 5), see manufacturer information at <http://www.flexxifinger.com/flexxifloat.php>.



Figures 4A & 4B. FlexxiFinger lifter Arm model FlexxiFloat 200 (left), which is currently being recommended in the Texas High Plains for 2014. The lower tip, or shoe, model is part number 20345 (right)

Here's what these look like mounted on the cutter bar (Fig. 6; this appears to be a different lifter Arm, probably the 250 model which is a little longer, and then there are four different shoes, or lower tips, mounted on the Arms in this demonstration photo). Two individuals have commented that the FlexxiFinger is doing a better job of lifting the downed sorghum than the John Deere fingers in Figs. 1 & 2. One grower in Lynn Co. who was running JD fingers on 11/26/2014 switched on 11/28 to FlexxiFinger, and has harvested a couple of fields. He noted that on uneven ground they were snagging the John Deere tips in the soil and bending them back under, and he has only snagged on FlexxiFinger, and said it was his own fault. I anticipate that FlexxiFingers probably cost more than John Deere, but I haven't priced any of the equipment.



Fig. 5. FlexxiFinger model FlexxiFloat 250 with different shoes mounted on a cutter bar.

Downer

Downer Milo & Sunflower Guard, Ransom, KS, Ph. 785-731-5634, www.downermiloguard.com One Hockley Co. producer I talked to (11/26/2014) has used these says they tend to plug up in downed sorghum. These in fact may act more like a guard than something to lift downed sorghum, but they can slightly reduce header losses in regular grain sorghum and might help in grain sorghum that is ~1,500-2000 lbs./A or less in yield.



Other Equipment?

If there is other commercially available equipment that you are using or are aware of please let me know about it so it can be included here.

This is not an endorsement by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service of any particular commercial product but a courtesy to help Texas High Plains sorghum farmers deal with the recent grain sorghum fields that fell down in the November 23 winds.

Salvage Harvest Tips for Downed Grain Sorghum

Here are suggestions as well as feedback from several growers I have talked to date with downed grain sorghum.

- It is worth waiting and the expense is readily justified to get headers equipped to harvest the downed grain sorghum.
- Experiment with the header height, finger tips, header and finger angles, etc. to see what works the best. Farmers believe they are getting about 2/3 to 4/5 of the completely downed sorghum harvested with the above equipment. But you may have to drive very slow! Even less than 2 mph if the stalks were wet (not the case so much now, December 1st).
- Depending on the direction the stalks are down, your best results will likely be obtained by harvesting the field in one direction. You may have to negotiate this with hired combines, but

the grain savings appear to be worth it in nearly all cases, especially as in some fields you may get twice the amount of grain harvested based on the optimum direction of travel.

- Harvest first your standing grain sorghum that is still standing, even if there might be up to a third of it lodged. Else standing sorghum runs the risk of falling down more, too. You have time to come back and get the lodged grain sorghum as it shouldn't be damaged much on the ground for the time being. This will give you more time to get the header equipped for downed sorghum, but even the above attachments could help you reduce small losses in standing sorghum.

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