

History of the combine told

NEW HOLLAND - Modern rotary combines are the result of 100 years development experience. The name of the machine took some development, too.

Actually, a couple of thousand years of grain growing history are all neatly tied up in our word "combine". But mainly it happened in the last 50 years.

As recently as 1923, big-scale farmers in the Montana wheat country were calling the machines by their correct and proper name: "Combined Harvester and Thresher." Since then, the term's been shortened into the single word we now use to talk about grain harvesting machines, says George Eastman, product manager for combines at Sperry New Holland.

From the time of Abraham to George Washington, farmers cut and threshed grain by hand. Cutting was usually by sickle or reaping hook.

Threshing was by flail or animal treading. Either way, sheaves of grain were spread out on a threshing

floor for the operation. Raking off the straw came next. This was followed by separating grain and chaff.

We still do it in exactly those same three steps. Even in a TR70. First we thresh, then we remove straw, then we separate grain and chaff in a final separate operation. But we've made progress.

Most of the progress came since the death of George Washington. First, the grain cradle replaced the sickle. Threshing was a wintertime task. In the summer you had your hands full enough to just get the wheat cradled, bundled and hauled into the barn. There was no time to swing the flail. And all the grain was flail-threshed.

Before the Civil War, threshing was already going mechanical over a lot of the country.

The war sparked a boost in grain price. This, in turn, helped make mechanization more feasible. Knowing about the machines didn't help when grain prices were too low to pay for reapers and threshers.

But the practical combine

was still years away in the next century.

A combined harvester-thresher was already invented by Hiram Moore. After tinkering with it for a while he more or less got it working in 1853. A herd of horses pulled and powered it. It was ahead of its time.

When the time for the combine came, it was too

large and too expensive for most farms but the big "bonanza" farms of the West were just right for it, according to the biggest Bonanza farmer of them all, Thomas Campbell.

During the World War I food crisis, Campbell farmed a stretch of land of hundreds of thousands of acres that stretched a good many miles wide from north to south. His observation on the 24-foot cut machines was: "Only seven men are required to operate this

wonderful combined harvester and thresher." The name was almost seven times too large. So, farmers shortened it down to

one word "combine" in much less time than it took the manufacturers to get the operation requirements down from seven men to one.



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