New silos boost Pennfield storage capacity

Workmen are still putting finishing touches on a series of mammoth storage elevators at Pennfield Corp.'s plant near Lancaster. When the structures are completed, the firm will have one of the largest capacity feed plants in the Northeast, according to company officials.

With the explosive increase in chicken numbers in Southeastern Pennsylvania, a rail or truck strike, or a serious snowstorm, could create serious problems for poultrymen cut off from normal feed supplies.

"Feed trucks can generally make it through to farms no matter what the weather," notes Ken Greenwood, production manager for Pennfield, Inc. "But if we run out of ingredients, we're in trouble and our customers are in trouble.

When we built our new manufacturing facility three years ago at Lancaster's Hempfield Industrial Park, we knew eventually we'd need more storage capacity. Well, we've spent the summer building it, and it will be ready by October 1. When we're done, Pennfield will have one of the largest feed mills in the East".

Over the summer, five silos were erected at the Hempfield site. Four of the structures, each 100-feet high and 24-feet in diameter, stand in a cluster. They will hold such feed ingredients as soybean meal, gluten meal and wheat middlings. The cluster will have a storage capacity of 4,750 tons of ingredients, according to Greenwood.

The fifth silo dwarfs the other four in the cluster. Although only 10 feet higher than the cluster, the big silo is 60 feet in diameter and will hold 6,750 tons of corn - a quarter of a million bushels.

And it's all for chicken feed.

While they were increasing storage at Hempfield, they were also boosting production capacity by some 80 percent, nearly double what it had been, Greenwood pointed out.

"We've been able to keep up with our customers' demands," he said, "but we are running the Hempfield plant 24 hours a day. And we've been straining the people and equipment at our other facilities in York, Palmyra and Rohrerstown."

When the new silos are ready in October, Pennfield's storage capacity will be five times what it is now, Greenwood said "Right now, with normal production, we can empty out completely in two days. With our new elevators, we'll have a 10-day cushion."

The expanded plant will have a tremendous appetite for corn, Greenwood noted. Running 24 hours a day, the Hempfield facility has been producing feed at the rate of 60 tons an hour. After October, they should be able to keep up with demand on an 18-hour schedule.

All the feed goes to chickens - both laying hens and broilers - within an 80-mile radius of the plant. Most of the corn used in the mill also comes from farms in Lancaster and surrounding counties.

Greenwood takes pride in the fact that the new silos were erected largely by local college students on their summer breaks. "These structures were put up with a slipforming process," he said. "It's a technique not too common here in the East, so we had the design work done by a firm in Atlanta, and the actual construction was handled by

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