

## Lebanon dairyman 'retires' into solar drying

BY DICK ANGLESTEIN

FONTANA — You're 63 years old and thinking about slowing down a bit.

You've been milking cows for more than three decades and finally decide to sell the herd off.

But you love the land and its way of life. You want to keep on farming.

So, what do you do?

If you're Robert Sollenberger, of Lebanon County, you switch your land entirely into cash grain farming and utilize solar drying to help cut production costs.

"My wife and I thought about it quite some time," he said.

"We traveled around and looked at various operations.

"With the solar drying, I think it's a good way to ease into retirement and still keep active on the farm."

Sollenberger's home-constructed twin solar panels just went up this week on the farm located along Rt. 322. They're easily visible from the highway for anyone driving between Fontana and Campbelltown.

"The first thing you learn is that not too much is really known about solar drying in this area," Sollenberger said.

"You learn to improvise with materials and plans very quickly."

Sollenberger got his plans for the panels from the University of Illinois. But right off the bat he used some Yankee ingenuity to adapt them to his purposes.

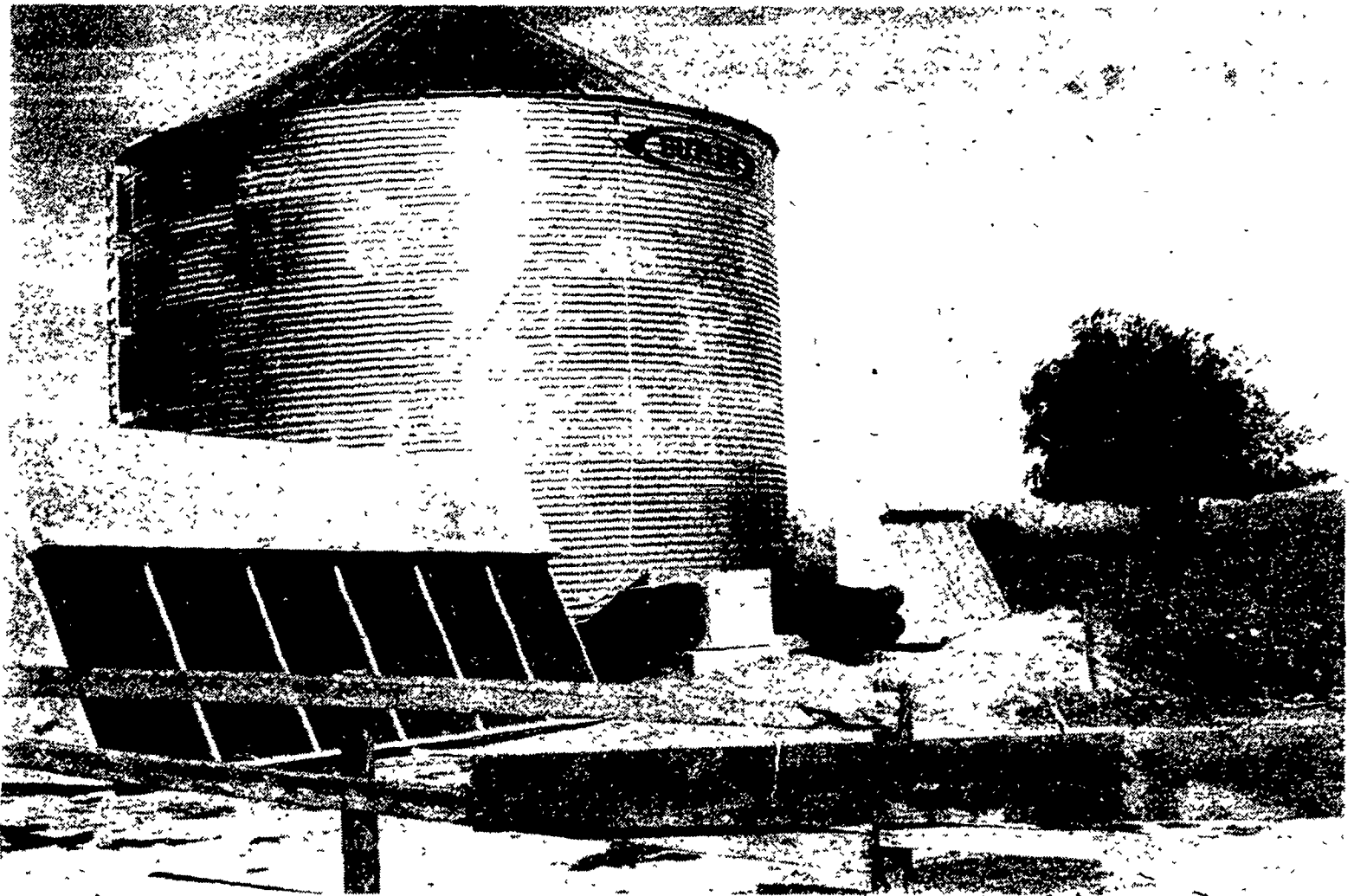
Each panel measures 24 feet long by 12 feet high. The plans called for solid one-piece construction.

"I wanted to store the panels after the corn is dried so I hinged the top quarter of the panel," he said.

"By folding the top three feet down, I can pull them into the old stall barn and keep them out of the weather when they're not needed."

The plans also called for a single piece of 18-inch plastic piping to take the heated air from each collector through the fan into the grain bin.

"But the only piece of 18-inch drain tile I could find was of stiff, rigid construction and just wasn't suitable," he explained.



These twin solar panels connected to 12,000-bushel drying bin were built by Robert Sollenberger, of Lebanon County, for approximately \$1,500. Retiring from dairying, Sollen-

berger is switching into cash grain farming with solar-assisted drying.

"So, I did some fast mental figuring and decided on four 10-inch plastic drain tile sections of flexible construction."

The two 12x24-foot collection panels provide 576 square feet of heating area. The 24-inch fan on the grain bin pulls air into the top of the panels.

Interior construction features 2x4's nailed on end, which provide a three and one-half-inch space through which the air is pulled just beneath the collection surface. The surface is the plexi-type material developed by DuPont for greenhouse use.

Each panel rests on a four-foot base, which forms a storage area for the heated air. It is then pulled

from each panel by the fan into the grain bin.

"I have 100 acres in corn and if I average 120 bushels that will just fill the bin," Sollenberger said.

In addition to building the solar panels, he and his wife erected the bin, with the help of a few neighbors at times.

"I don't know how much of a test the panels will receive this year," he said.

"I have some corn in the field already at 16.6 percent moisture. But some was planted later and will need more drying."

Thus, Sollenberger's farming life is moving from one phase to another.

"We milked for 31 years," he said. "We had as many as 65 milkers at one time.

"But they say at about my age, you're supposed to think about taking it more easy.

"This gives us a chance to semi-retire but still remain in farming.

"Now, we got to wait and see what the price of corn is going to be."

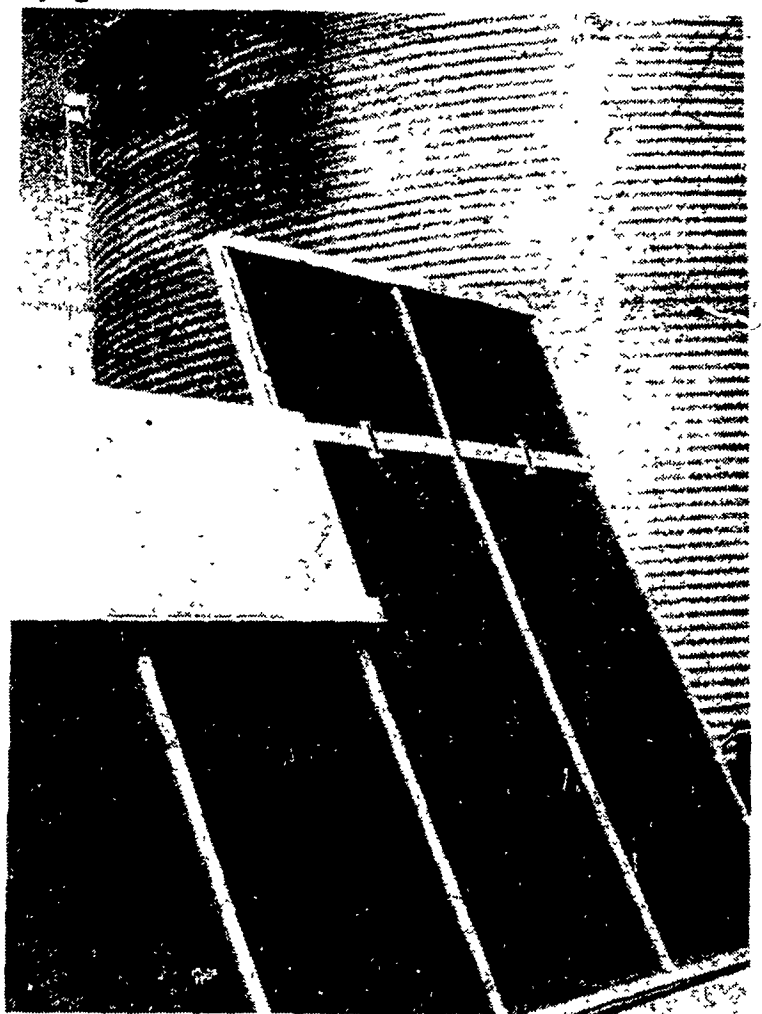
And the solar panels could be put to additional use in the future.

"The panels can be moved rather easily," Sollenberger said.

"They're built right on skids.

"Perhaps, I'll pull them closer to the house and use them also to heat our water when they're not needed to dry the corn."

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Solar panel, with top section open, exposes a 12x24-foot area to the sun's rays.



Robert Sollenberger, whose farm is along Rt. 322 west of Fontana, shows top section of solar panel, which he constructed on hinges to facilitate storage.

## USDA withdraws insect-infested grain proposal

NEW YORK, N.Y. — A proposal to change rules under the U.S. Grain Standards Act to prohibit treatment of insect-infested grain during loading on ships other than dry bulk cargo carriers has been withdrawn by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Kenneth Gilles, administrator of USDA's Federal Grain Inspection Service, said many comments received said other less restrictive alternatives should be evaluated.

The agency had proposed that if

insect-infested grain were loaded on carriers other than bulk dry cargo ships, the elevator could either remove the grain from the ship or receive a certificate that said the grain was infested.

USDA will continue to permit the treatment of insect-infested grain during loading aboard lakers, tween deckers and oceangoing barges; subject to an official examination of the grain to check effectiveness of the treatment, Gilles said.

Intransit treatment of insect-

infested grain was approved earlier and is still in effect for bulk carriers, he said. We will continue our interim policy of permitting intransit treatment of grain in tankers, pending completion of research.

USDA is preparing an alternate proposal that would provide safe and effective treatment of insect-infested grain during loading as well as minimizing the economic hardship on the U.S. grain and maritime industries.