

Oley Area Silo Topples

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p.m. my younger son Chris heard the staves breaking. We had time to move the blower and a wagon before the silo went over," Elmer Eyrich explained. "We moved the family way back in case it exploded. Then we watched it go. Chris even got pictures of it," he added.

The Fickes silo, erected in 1976, was about 55 feet full of corn silage. "It had about 4 feet in it from last year. We've been filling for about two weeks and we had about 45 acres of corn silage in it. Normally if that silo has 70 feet in it, that's enough for the year, Eyrich said.

No one is sure what caused the accident. "Some of the lower staves were showing signs of deterioration from the acid, so we had them checked two years ago by a reputable dealer but they weren't overly concerned about it at that time," Eyrich stated.

At this point the Eyrich family is working to salvage as much as they can from their loss. The silo, complete with unloader, fell into a harvested corn field. Mangled steel hoppers were strewn in the area amid spilled sillage. Concrete, in



Elmer and Cheryl Eyrich look over one of the taller sections of the collapsed silo. They fell fortunate that the 80-foot structure fell into a harvested corn field instead of their feeding area.

every size from slabs to bits, was scattered in the wreckage. "I'm grateful that it fell this way. Our feed room is right next to it, and it could have gone that way," added Eyrich.

By 4:30 that afternoon the family was contemplating what to do with the mess. Chris and his older brother Ty had the tractor and

front-end loader out hauling away some of the larger metal hoops and the top of the silo. The bottom of the silo was still intact even though it was laying on its side, silage packed within the concrete and metal hoops measured more than four times the height of a grown man. "A new silo isn't in the financial picture. We hope to

cover it with black plastic. Then we'll load it in the chuck wagon and feed it that way. I'm not sure just yet how we'll get all the concrete out of it but I know it will take a lot of work," Eyrich said.

Eyrich's wife, Cheryl, summed up the situation neatly. "Elmer says he's not happy that it happened, but he is going to try not to lose a lot of sleep over it."

According to Penn State ag engineering professor Harvey Manbeck, who has a strong interest in ag structures, there are a number of reasons that silos can fall down. Many of them are related to the silo's construction and design. "Silos can fall for several reasons. Sometimes they are blown over in extreme weather. In the Berks County area, silos should be constructed to withstand 70- to 80-mph winds even when they are empty. A full silo can withstand more wind because of its increased mass," he said.

"Another problem is the disintegration of hoops. Also, some silos used for high-moisture materials may have an insufficient number of restraining hoops," Manbeck explained.

"Seepage creates problems as well. If the inside of the silo wall is not impervious to silage juices,

the seepage can deteriorate a concrete stave. I know many farmers will disagree with me, but these silos shouldn't seep. Sometimes poor - quality concrete or a cracked liner can cause problems.

"Farmers should be sure they have an adequate foundation to put their silo on. Silos have lots of mass and no matter how you try, you can't fill them perfectly evenly. Pick a well-drained site for your silo. If it has to be on a wet site your requirements for your foundation are much more stringent. Take special care in these situations."

Manbeck urged farmers to use good practices with their silos. "Always try to fill from as near the center as possible. Watch out for even distribution of the load."

Farmers also should frequently inspect their silo including the concrete, the liner and the steel reinforcements. Normally a farmer can do his own visual inspection, but if the silo is five or 10 years old, and the farmer has doubts a professional should be called.

"If you change the material you are putting in your silo, check the specifications to see if it can carry the load. If it was designed for grass silage or haylage, it may not be able to handle shelled corn," said Manbeck. Finally put your material in at a moisture content so that seepage doesn't occur. I know many farmers won't agree but silos aren't designed to seep."

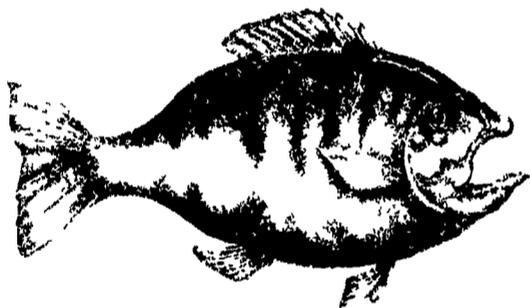
Manbeck stressed that silo collapses have to be kept in perspective. "For the number of silos we have out there, there are very few failures."

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