

Yields look strong



The Commercial Review/Ray Cooney

Mark Overman (in combine) and Josh Overman (driving alongside) of Ohio harvest a soybean field on the west side of county road 500 East, just north of country road 300 South, last week.

Indiana and Ohio crop yields have fared well in 2023 compared to those in the drought-stricken western corn belt

By RAY COONEY
The Commercial Review

The harvest this year depends heavily on geography.

In Indiana and Ohio, yields look strong.

The same cannot be said for the western corn belt.

Corn and soybean yields in Indiana and Ohio are expected to be up this year, hitting 197

bushels per acre of the former in the Hoosier state and 61 bushels per acre for the latter.

“This year is probably even more variable than it was last year,” said Ben Brown, senior research associate for agricultural and applied economics at the University of Missouri. “Indiana, Ohio both anticipated to have record soybean yields this year.

“We flipped the script a little bit in the western corn belt — pretty sad soybean yields.

“Even on the corn side, corn yields in Ohio, Indiana, Michigan (are strong). In Missouri, they’re off 15 to 20% from where they normally would be.”

Those Indiana corn yield numbers are up 3.7% from the 2022 growing season. Soybeans are

even stronger, up 6.1% over the previous year. (Ohio is projected for more modest increases to 195 bushels per acre of corn and 57 bushels per acre of soybeans respectively.)

Meanwhile, Missouri and Minnesota are down 12.4% and 8.2%, respectively, for corn, with smaller declines in the soybean sector.

As of Monday’s United States

Department of Agriculture report, 52% of corn had been harvested in Indiana. That’s up from 44% at the same time last year and even with the five-year average.

For soybeans, 52% have been harvested, down slightly from 2022 but a percentage point above the five-year average.

See **Strong** page 4B

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Gaerke's slide into DMs

Carts are making task easier for poultry producers

By LOUISE RONALD

The Graphic Printing Company
Turkeys keep getting bigger and bigger.

That creates a challenge for the people who raise them.

Brothers Derek and Mike Gaerke of rural Fort Recovery are stepping up to that challenge — for themselves and for their fellow turkey farmers.

One of the routine tasks of the job is to remove dead birds (referred to as “mortality”) from barns filled with turkeys.

“Twenty or 25 years ago, the birds weren't quite as big,” said Mike.

At that time, the brothers explained, it was possible to use a wheelbarrow for the task. Possible, but hard on the farmer's back and knees.

Bigger turkeys mean harder work.

“Birds now get up to 50 pounds — even more than that sometimes. If you've got a sickness or anything like that in the barn and you have to handle multiple birds, it takes a toll on your body,” said Derek.

The brothers saw how the work affected the health of their father and uncle (with whom they now manage four barns of 5,000 to 6,000 turkeys each) and about four years ago decided to see if they could develop a better way to cull the dead animals.

“We ... wanted to come up with something to make our jobs easier, quicker and safer,” Derek said.

The result was a new business — DM Carts — which the two men operate from one of the outbuildings on the farm.

See DMs page 5B



The Commercial Review/Louise Ronald

Mike Gaerke, left, and his brother Derek attach a V-shaped plow to a conveyor cart they built at their rural Fort Recovery business, DM Carts. “We ... wanted to come up with something to make our jobs easier, quicker and safer,” Derek said.

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These local businesses care about the health and safety of the farmers, ranchers and agricultural workers they serve. Please take a moment to review these simple tips designed to protect your health and safety on the job.

Tips for safer farming

Tractor accidents, grain entrapment and injuries from ornery livestock are just some of the dangers agricultural workers face every day. In fact, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health says agriculture is one of the most hazardous industries in the United States.

In 2016, the agricultural industry had a rate of 21.4 deaths per 100,000 workers, and each day agricultural workers experienced 100 non-fatal, lost-work-time injuries.

Farms are dangerous places, and while carelessness can and does contribute to many incidents, accidents also take place during routine, seemingly safe activities. These farm safety guidelines can help lower the risk of injuries.

• **Know farm equipment.** Read and follow all instructions in the equipment operation manuals. In addition, attend local farm safety workshops to learn more about specific equipment and products.

• **Conduct routine safety checks.** Look around buildings and grounds for obvious hazards, such as fire hazards and hazardous materials, including farm chemicals that are not stored correctly.

• **Practice cleanliness.** Maintain clean and neat work areas with tools stored properly and out of the way after use.

• **Be mindful of your clothing and hair.** Many accidents involve a power take-off system, or PTO, which is a common component of large rotary mowers, tractors and forage choppers. Clothing can easily get caught in an engaged but unguarded PTO stub. It's easy for laces or coveralls to become wrapped around a spinning stub shaft. The PTO driveline and other protrusion points also can be dangerous if people do not pay attention.

• **Use rollover protection structures.** ROPS can be used on tractors and other equipment to prevent injuries. In addition, wear seat belts and employ other safety equipment as advised.

• **Avoid extra passengers.** It can be tempting to take the kids for a spin, but do not allow additional passengers to ride on agricultural equipment.

• **Exercise caution when handling chemicals.** Take extra precautions when handling any chemicals, including pesticides.

• **Wear protective gear.** Wear appropriate gear and equipment as outlined by NIOSH or the Mine Safety and Health Administration. Make sure the skin, feet, ears, eyes, and hands are protected at all times.

• **Employ lock out/tag out control.** This is a process where one can work on equipment only after every energy source has been controlled, such as hydraulic, pneumatic, mechanical, and electrical, according to Rural Mutual Insurance Company. Turning off equipment and using certain controls or locks on devices can prevent equipment from restarting before it is safe to do so.

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The Commercial Review/Ray Cooney

A farmer finishes harvesting the final strip of soybeans in a field at the northeast corner of the intersection of county roads 400 South and 200 West. Soybean yields in Indiana are coming in at 61 bushels per acre.

Strong ...

Continued from page 1B
However, the variable yields in the United States have not been mirrored beyond its borders, as global grain production has been strong this year. "Brazil has supplied a lot of corn and soybeans to global market that has kind of taken a little bit of the U.S. market share away," said Brown, who worked at Ohio State University previously before returning to his home state of Missouri.

As a result, prices for both commodities have been mostly dropping since early summer.

Corn was at about \$6.75 in mid-June before plum-

meting to near \$4.60 in late August. There's been a slight rebound in recent weeks, with prices climbing back to near \$5.

Soybeans were strong at above \$15.50 into late July. But they dropped to near \$12.50 in the last week.

Still, prices are strong historically. Corn was hovering below \$4 before the coronavirus pandemic. Soybeans at that time were in the \$9 range.

Looking ahead, many of the factors that were being considered heading into the 2023 growing season remain as 2024 approaches. The war in Ukraine is continuing

and the cost of production remains high.

Whether or not those factors will lead to expected results, or repeat this year's results, remains to be seen.

For instance, Brown said the high input prices heading into 2023 indicated that producers would most likely move away from corn and shift more acres to soybeans.

"We didn't see that," he noted. "We actually saw 4 million acres more corn planted than what was expected. ..."

"Fast forward that to 2024. The same conditions are there. We would expect corn acreage to fall

a little bit. Our expectation is that corn acreage comes down 3 million acres (in 2024) relative to (2023). ... But again, that was not what played out this year. The weather was dry and it was warm enough. Producers started planting and they just kept planting corn."

While some conditions are holdovers from last year, new forces are working on the market as well.

The recent conflict between Israel and Hamas, Brown said, could have an impact on energy markets. Iran, a major supplier of oil, is a supporter of Hamas.

"If the U.S. were to

tighten and put even greater sanctions on Iran and Iranian oil, and other countries around the globe followed, we would anticipate higher oil prices, which drives up cost of production, drives up transportation costs for the end product, drive up fertilizer," he said. "I would anticipate that that would have an impact on the cost of production side."

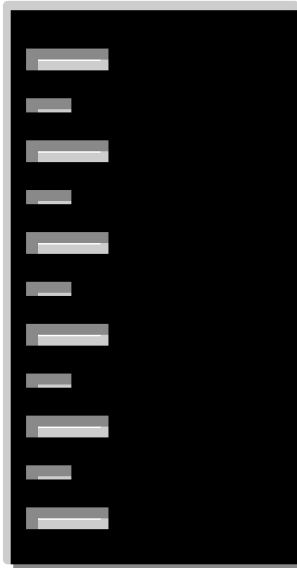
Domestic politics also play a role, as the U.S. House of Representatives was still without a speaker as of Tuesday morning. That has left the country without an updated farm bill, as the previ-

ous legislation expired Sept. 30.

The impact of not having a farm bill in place won't be seen until at least January — it will hit the dairy sector first, Brown said — but the window to get a new farm bill in place will be tight. (He noted that other legislation, such as the 2024 budget, will take precedence once the House returns to session.)

"My expectation right now on a farm bill is the likelihood of just a flat-out extension of the previous farm bill becoming more and more likely," he said.

See Strong page 5B



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Farmers are pushing for greater protection

By **ADRIANA PEREZ**

Chicago Tribune
Tribune News Service

Vast fields of corn line the roads near the village of Beecher. Over one hill, the landscape shifts, revealing plots studded with medicinal and industrial hemp plants.

First-generation farmers Rachael and Jesse Smedberg grow hemp on their 120-acre organic and regenerative farm, Tulip Tree Gardens. Five years ago, the couple decided to buy the farm near the Indiana border, and they have since been experimenting with sustainable techniques.

"We feel like this is our purpose, to restore soil together," Rachael Smedberg said. "This is our purpose, to educate our community. And it's our purpose to raise up our kids and teach them that we need to protect the Earth."

After the expiration of

the 2018 federal farm bill last month, those involved in the nation's agricultural industry are pushing for the new bill to better protect crops and the people who grow them as a rapidly changing climate threatens livelihoods, human health and, consequently, the entire food system.

Since 1933, Congress has passed 18 farm bills to govern policy in the agricultural sector such as income support, food assistance, trade, conservation and more.

In the last few years, however, climate change, a pandemic, supply chain disruptions and inflation have significantly challenged the food and farm systems in the country. These unprecedented hurdles have motivated farmers and workers to more vehemently advocate for financial investment and protections in the next bill.

Despite the recent expiration of the farm bill known as the Agricultural Improvement Act, the program funding and laws that it put in place won't expire, said Omanjana Goswami, an interdisciplinary scientist with the Food and Environment Program at the Union of Concerned Scientists. She said the food and farming systems will run on autopilot for a while.

Nonetheless, farmworkers, owners and advocates are holding out hope that Congress can pass the new bill sooner rather than later. The farm bill is updated roughly every five years.

"There's definitely some political will," said Elena Grossman, a senior research specialist at the University of Illinois at Chicago and director of the Climate and Health Institute at the university's School of Public Health.

DMs ...

Continued from page 2B

That's in addition to having full-time jobs, taking care of turkeys and growing crops.

The mainstay of the business is the G-10 Conveyor Cart.

"This cart is our bread and butter," said Derek. "We designed it for the turkey farmer. We're turkey farmers, and turkey farmers are our biggest customer."

Powered by an electric motor with a battery that can last all day before recharging, the unit operates quietly, so the birds are not startled. A V-shaped plow at the front of the unit gently shoves the sea of live turkeys out of the way so the driver can pick up the deceased animals.

The side walls of the cart are low so the farmer doesn't have to lift the dead birds very high. And once the mortality is in the cart, the farmer need not touch it again. A conveyor belt carries the contents to an elevated position so they can be put directly into a skid loader bucket or wherever they are to be disposed.

Carl Link, a Gaerke family friend who also has a turkey farm in rural Fort Recovery, replaced another motorized cart with a G-10 about a year and a half ago. The DM unit has a lot more power than his old cart, he said. He liked it enough to buy one for each of his two barns.

"It's a safety thing," Link said. "Once you put the mortality in the cart, you don't have to handle it again. ... It makes it so much easier."

Initial customers, like Link, were local turkey farmers, but that is changing.

"Just recently, we have broadened where we sell," said Mike.

"It's grown so much that now we've expanded to many other states," Derek agreed.

Not only have they broadened their

sales area, they also have expanded the company's product line. DM now offers flatbed and dump carts in addition to the G-10.

Most customers raise turkeys or other poultry, but they have one who put a milk tank on a flatbed and uses the cart to feed his calves. Another is a barn-builder who carries his tools and supplies into the structure with a DM cart.

"It's narrow enough that it'll go through a standard 36-inch door," Mike said.

"They're useful for tight applications," Derek added. "The single wheel steering allows you to turn really sharp in tight spaces."

All the carts can be customized to meet the buyer's needs. The front end can be adapted to one or two wheels. Flatbeds can be modified to carry a load of up to 1,600 pounds.

"If you come to us and you say, 'Hey, I like what you have, but could you do this to it, change it just a little bit?' we can change it. Whether they have the idea or whether we have to come up with the idea, we normally can figure out a way to get it done the way the customer wants it."

Design changes are first looked over and drawn up by an engineer. Metal for the carts is cut and powder coated elsewhere, but everything else is done on site, mostly by Derek and Mike themselves, occasionally with part-time help.

"We make it all," said Mike.

So far, the brothers have sold (primarily through their website — dm-carts.com) between 150 and 200 units, but they expect the expanded offerings will lead to expanded sales.

"That's the goal," Derek said, "to keep growing."

Strong ...

Continued from page 4B

In the livestock sector, Brown noted continued record prices as drought is reducing the herd and more cattle are being "pulled forward." Prices are up to \$178 per 100 weight, with projections calling for them to increase another \$11 by 2025 before beginning to come down.

Part of that pricing push is from a reduction in production, which is down 2 billion pounds from 2022. (Brown pointed out that the record prices do not necessarily mean record profitability, as input prices have increased as well.)

Meanwhile, he said he believes pork has hit the bottom of its price cycle,

with some recovery expected next year.

In the area of poultry, prices are expected to moderate while production continues to grow.

"I think we're going to continue to see broiler production continue to increase," said Brown, noting that beef consumption is projected to decline a bit while poultry is continuing to increase. "I think you could say the same thing on the turkey side. Production just continues to increase."

"We've been very fortunate so far that production of those has also continued to increase. That's what's allowed both ending stocks and prices to both ... remain elevated."

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Still standing

Threatened silos are a remnant of Chicago's history

By **RON GROSSMAN**
Chicago Tribune
Tribune News Service

If the Damen Avenue Silos are demolished, they will take with them some of the final remains of Carl Sandburg's poetic salute to Chicago: "Hog Butcher for the World, Tool Maker, Stacker of Wheat."

The stockyards closed more than a half-century ago. About the only trace of Chicago's manufacturing glory is the forest of balconies tacked onto repurposed factories. Now the Silos' owner, Michael Tadin Jr., wants to level the massive industrial complex in the 2800 block of South Damen Avenue.

Tadin bought them from the state of Illinois in 2022. Reportedly, he wants to replace them with a trucking facility, a corporate headquarters or both. The demolition plans are on hold pending a review by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

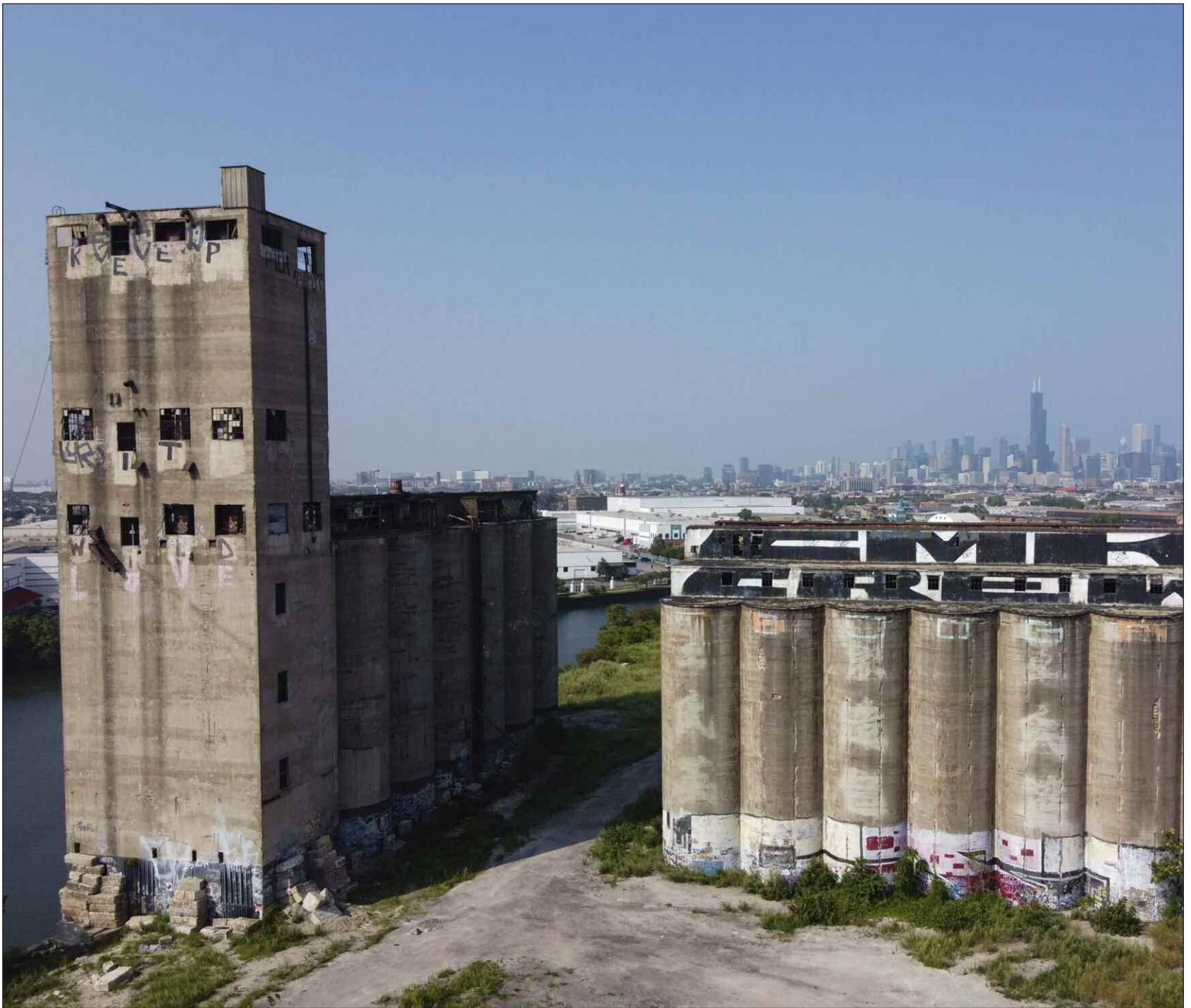
When the Santa Fe Railroad built the Damen Silos in 1906, Chicago ruled the wheat market, having transformed American agriculture.

"Let the golden grain come. We can take care of it all," a Chicago newspaper proclaimed half a century earlier. The Chicago Board of Trade was nicknamed "the Altar of Ceres," the ancient goddess of grain.

That history is lost in the vague misnomer "silos."

Inland Architect magazine in 1896 called the towering silos the first skyscrapers. One of the silos is 15 stories tall. It dwarfs buildings of the time with their human occupants.

See **Standing** page 8B



Tribune News Service/Chicago Tribune/Trent Sprague

The Damen Silos complex on Chicago's Lower West Side on Aug. 22, 2023. When the Santa Fe Railroad built the Damen Silos in 1906, Chicago ruled the wheat market. The stockyards closed more than a half-century ago. About the only trace of Chicago's manufacturing glory is the forest of balconies tacked onto repurposed factories. Now the Silos' owner, Michael Tadin Jr., wants to level the massive industrial complex in the south 2800 block of Damen Avenue. Tadin bought them from the state of Illinois in 2022. Reportedly, he wants to replace them with a trucking facility, a corporate headquarters or both. The demolition plans are on hold pending a review by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

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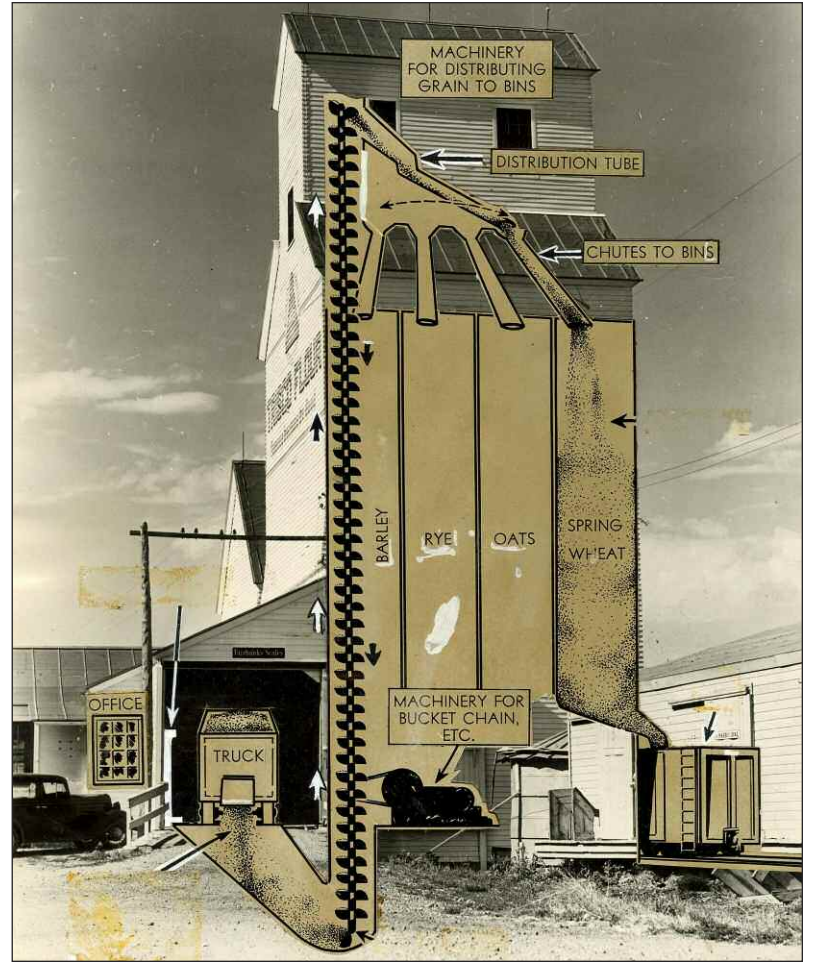
An illustration on a photo shows a typical grain elevator, circa 1940.

Invented elsewhere, the grain elevator was perfected in Chicago. Its ungainly progeny can be seen in the towns and hamlets of Middle America and beyond.

"An elevator is as ugly a monster as has yet been produced," said the British author Anthony Trollope while touring America in 1861. "In uncouthness of form it out does those obsolete old brutes that used to roam the semi-aqueous world, and live a most uncomfortable life with their great hungering stomachs and unsatisfied maws."

The Tribune seconded Trollope's judgment.

"Immensely ponderous, high-towering, dreary-looking structures, whose vast sides are scarce ever found pierced by windows, and whose general monotony of outline is seldom relieved by so much as the slightest ornamentation," the paper observed of Chicago's massive grain elevators in 1892.




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Standing ...

Continued from page 7B
In fact, it and its companions are parts of a grain elevator.

The other components are a mechanism that lifts grain to a platform where it would be routed to one or another of its vertical storage bins. Those are the silos, and each has a spigot toward the bottom. When it was opened, gravity would send the wheat down to whatever vehicle would take it away.

Noting that Chicago's grain elevators stood between the West — where wheat was grown — and Eastern cities that needed it, the Illinois Supreme Court, writing in a rate regulation case, said they "take toll of all who pass."

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Today the Damen Avenue Silos, out of use since the late 1970s except for occasional movie shoots, look even sorer.

But then grain elevators were never intended to be attractive. They were an engineer's response to an accountant's innovation.

In 1857, the Tribune reported that the Board of Trade had established a system for grading wheat, while noting some quibbling over the details. Those disputes continued for years, but from its inception, the wheat grading system was a game-changer.

Formerly, a farmer had to shovel his harvest into individual gunnysacks, a

laborious job. Now he could pitchfork it into a wagon or truck and get it to a public warehouse, as a grain elevator is legally defined.

"The theory of a public warehouse here is that grain must go in and out at the same grade," the Tribune noted in an 1895 explanation of the wheat trade.

To grasp how the theory works in practice, consider the analogue of a bank. The dollar bills someone gets when making a withdrawal are not the same ones he deposited. But they have the exact same value.

Similarly, the grain a farmer withdraws from an elevator isn't the grain he brought there. It couldn't be. His harvest has merged with that of other farmers who brought the same grade of wheat to the elevator. What a farmer has is a receipt showing the amount of wheat he is entitled to withdraw.

That is the hidden beauty of those dreary elevators. A farmer doesn't have to hustle to bring his grain to market when wheat commands the price he wants. He just sends the elevator operator a sell order.

Collectively, all the wheat in various elevators enables the market to respond to changes in demand, yet those who play it see only the tip of an iceberg.

"There is many a member of the Board of Trade who makes and loses a dozen small fortunes a month in grain deals who couldn't describe the general plan of the average grain elevator to do so," the Tribune observed in 1892.

On the trading floor, a visitor would be befuddled by what novelist Frank Norris called "the trampling and shoutings in the Pit."

Norris' novel "The Pit" (as the trading floor was called) is the story of a millionaire trader bankrupted

by a failed attempt to corner the wheat market.

Much the same happened in real life. The thought of all the wheat in grain elevators tempted some traders to dream of controlling so much flour that merchants would have to pay a trader's jacked-up price or forgo filling bakers' orders.

Among them was Ira Munn, who pioneered the grain elevator in Chicago. He became fabulously rich and president of the Board of Trade. Then he tried cornering the market. As the Tribune reported, a rumor spread that "all was not right with Munn and Scotts elevator receipts." More wheat had been sold than the firm owned. In 1872, Munn was expelled from the Board of Trade. He ended up running a boardinghouse in a Colorado gold-mining town.

In addition to being subject to unscrupulous speculators, Chicago's 100 or so grain elevators were vulnerable to fire. Wheat isn't usually very combustible. But a grain elevator houses a flammable mixture poised to explode: large amounts of grain dust in a confined space and suspended in air; the oxygen of that air; and heat supplied by static electricity. Other factors might include a sticking conveyor belt or even a carelessly discarded cigarette.

Grain explosions regularly occurred on the site of the Damen Silos. Operators of fallen elevators didn't move on because of Chicago's topography.

Ideally an elevator should be bordered by water on one side, railroad tracks on the other. To accommodate that, Chicago held an advantage over St. Louis, where the broad and shallow expanse of the Mississippi River was unsuitable for such a setup. The slow-moving and steady Chicago River, along with its solid banks, proved more amenable, and the Damen Silos were built between the water's edge and railroad tracks.

Much of that accompanying infrastructure disappeared after the Damen Silos were abandoned in 1977 following a massive explosion. But the Silos' 15-story centerpiece still visually testifies to wheat's role in Chicago's growth from a frontier settlement to a metropolis.

The tower is disfigured by generations of graffiti. Bruised and battered, it has the look of a boxer still on his feet at the final bell, anxiously awaiting the judges' decision.



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Pumpkin weights in at 2,501 pounds

By KRISTI MILLER

Pioneer Press
Tribune News Service

With hundreds of people watching, a forklift hauled "Joy," a gargantuan pumpkin, over to the scale at the Stillwater Harvest Fest's Giant Pumpkin Weigh-Off on Saturday afternoon.

Grower Charlie Bernstrom, of Lancaster, Minn., told the crowd he was nervous as everybody watched Joy being lifted onto the scale.

The pumpkin he'd started growing in April measured 20 feet around — the largest pumpkin to ever be weighed on an official scale.

But more important than that, it was a contender to break the world record set by another Minnesotan a few days before

in California when Travis Gienger of Anoka set the new world record with a 2,749-pound pumpkin.

Joy was the third pumpkin this year that Bernstrom had grown that weighed more than a ton (over 2,000 pounds). The biggest pumpkin he'd ever grown had weighed in at 2,131 pounds.

It was one of 50 giant pumpkins weighed at the Stillwater festival on Saturday.

"What's going through your mind?" an announcer asked Bernstrom as they watched the pumpkin being hoisted onto the scale before a crowd of hundreds alongside the St. Croix River.

"Nervous," Bernstrom said.

"The suspense is killing everybody!" a woman in the crowd said.

The announcer told the crowd to "think heavy thoughts."

Holding one daughter and with his hand on the shoulder of another, Bernstrom smiled as the crowd began to chant his name:

"Charlie! Charlie! Charlie! Charlie!"

Then the crowd counted down from 10.

But alas, when the cloth was lifted with a flourish from the screen showing



Tribune News Service/Pioneer Press/John Autey

Tom LaVigne, 7, left, and his brother Cody, 11, from Pelican Rapids, Minnesota, relax among their family's giant pumpkins Oct. 14 during the St. Croix Growers Association Giant Pumpkin Weigh-Off at Stillwater's Harvest Fest. In all, there were 50 giant pumpkins from five states at the event. The winning entry was the Lancaster, Minnesota, resident Charlie Bernstrom's 2,501-pound monster.

the digital numbers of the scale, the weight of Joy fell short of the world record by weighing in at 2,501 pounds.

Which made it the biggest pumpkin ever weighed at the Stillwater weigh-in, but short of the world record of 2,749 pounds. It also easily beat Bernstrom's personal record of 2,131 pounds.

Because of its circumference, the weight of the pumpkin had been estimated to be more than 2,540 pounds.

But, as Amy Lauritzen,

another grower said, a pumpkin's weight often has to do with what's inside and how thick (and heavy) the rind is. "You don't know what's inside the walls," she said.

During its peak growing season, Joy the pumpkin was estimated to be growing about 63 pounds a day.

"They say that pumpkins can grow 40 to 50 to 60 pounds a night," Lauritzen said. "They say you can hear the sand underneath it move and

hear the pumpkin grow. I want to sleep out there one night to listen."

One plant requires 800 to 1,000 square feet and 150 to 250 gallons of water a day, she said. It's a labor of love.

Lauritzen said growing

pumpkins should come with a warning: "It's super addicting and causes premature aging, and sleepless nights."

But along with growing a possibly award-winning pumpkin, the fun is in the community that is

formed as evidenced by the support the growers showed each other when each of the 50 pumpkins was weighed on Saturday.

"If you meet another pumpkin grower, you have a friend for life," Lauritzen said.



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