

Use of video cameras on farm intrigues producers

By HANNAH FLETCHER, For Farm & Ranch Guide

Thursday, August 3, 2006 9:03 AM CDT

WORTHINGTON, Iowa - Mike Ludwig is always looking for a more-efficient way to do business, especially during those busy times of year.

He runs Ludwig Custom Work, a forage-chopping business in Northeast Iowa, in addition to his cattle and corn operation.

Last fall, employees at Dyersville Implement introduced him to Ag Cam, a versatile video camera system designed for farm work.

Ludwig is giving the camera a try, hoping it might give him a better view of his truck or wagon while he is harvesting forage.

The small camera is mounted on the spout of Ludwig's chopper and sends a video signal to a monitor in his cab. This allows him to see how fast the truck is filling, without physically turning around to check.

"The goal was to keep from getting tired and fatigued," he said.

Ludwig is happy with the camera's durability and the monitor's clarity despite bouncing

and movement in the field. He has even knocked the camera off its perch a few times, but it continues to work.

He plans to try different angles from the spout to get a better view.

"We are still working the kinks out," he said.

So far, Ludwig's only hurdle is keeping the lens from becoming too dirty to give him a viewable image.

One of the advantages of the Ag Cam is its mobility, said Greg Drea, Ag Cam's Midwest distributor in Oto in northwest Iowa. The camera is held by a strong magnet and can be easily moved.

Using cameras on the farm might not be a new concept but Ag Cam is designed specifically for farm and outdoor tasks, Drea said.

"It can handle the ruggedness of agriculture, and it is water resistant," he said.


The makers of Ag Cam envisioned farmers using it to see areas of their equipment they would normally have to stop for.

Cameras can give farmers a view from a sprayer or planter to ensure placement, from a harvest wagon to view when it is full or a piece of equipment that isn't running properly.

Cameras also can be used as part of a security system.


With soaring energy prices, Drea said more farmers are interested in keeping a

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closer watch on their fuel barrel and anhydrous ammonia.

There is also an advantage for some farmers who want to keep an eye on their livestock for security reasons and to monitor them during birthing, he said.

Many farmers end up using Ag Cam for a multitude of functions, Drea noted.

"You can use it for a different function every day of the year," he said.

Drea said it often takes time to adopt the camera system to an operation.

"Everybody likes the idea, and they all want it. But, they have to make it fit into their cash flow," he said.

The system costs about \$1,000 per unit, but prices vary depending on the number of cameras, monitors and accessories purchased.

A basic system includes, one camera and one of three sizes of monitors, Drea said.

Also, there are options for multi-camera systems or multiple monitors and monitors displaying up to eight screens.

Accessories, such as motion sensors and digital video recorders, may be added.

Ludwig knows a handful of acquaintances in his area who also are using cameras, and they are using them for various reasons.

"I think there are a lot more people using it when you really talk to the other guys," he said.

Some put cameras to work in lambing and calving barns; others use them on field choppers, Ludwig said.

"It seems like they have been really pleased with it," he said.

Ludwig said he sees camera use as another example of the modern conveniences in the business. He also has had others comment on his unit.

"They are intrigued by it," he said. "I think it is because the technology is becoming more advanced."



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