



Western Grain Dryer's customers save time and effort, with systems that allow for earlier harvests, reduced spoilage and higher market grades.

LEADING THE WAY IN DESIGN AND INNOVATION

WESTERN GRAIN DRYER'S ADVANCED GRAIN-HANDLING TECHNOLOGY SAVES TIME, MONEY AND CROPS

By Geoff Kirbyson for the Free Press

You've probably never heard of Western Grain Dryer but you might want to thank them the next time you sit down to eat breakfast or have a beer.

The Elie, Manitoba-based company manufactures and designs machines that dry a wide variety of crops and foods that grow in farmers' fields in North America and abroad, including wheat, corn, barley, oats, sunflowers, hemp seeds and rice.

If you grew up in a concrete jungle and are wondering, 'Why would you have to dry grain in the first place?' think about pretty much anything you use or eat in your daily life. If it's wet, you dry it.

"If you're harvesting grain and you put it into storage wet, it's going to spoil very quickly. When you dry it properly, you can store it long term, for years. You don't want to be at the mercy of Mother Nature," said Cai Wallack, CEO and co-founder of Western Grain.

The drying capacity of its machines ranges from 500 bushels per hour all the way up to 10,000 bushels per hour. Drying seeds of various sizes can prove both labour intensive and costly when having to change screens to match the crop but Western Grain's machines are able to dry small and large seeds in the same dryer. Fuel costs are also lower compared to screen dryers because there's no resistance of airflow from a screen. Continuous flow non-screen dryers are more efficient by eliminating stops and starts and have maximum air flow without the possibility of plugged screens.

An increase in natural disasters and global warming have brought Western Grain's services into the forefront of food processing because of storm damage, floods, unpredictable weather patterns and shorter growing and harvesting seasons.

Another threat to farmers is early snowfalls, which can force them to leave crops in the fields over the winter at a reduced yield. It also means the crops are vulnerable to being eaten by animals.

"If they have a grain dryer, they can do it earlier when the weather is warmer," she said.

Each drying machine is a six-figure investment but users are

able to recoup their money by saving time and effort, having earlier harvests, reduced spoilage and higher market grades. Wallack said one Canadian farmer reportedly saved nearly \$1 million after buying one of Western Grain's dryers a number of years ago.

The company's customer base includes agriculture giants such as Richardson Pioneer, Viterra, Parrish & Heimbecker, Louis Dreyfus, Cargill, research centres at the University of Manitoba as well as "hundreds of thousands" of farmers across North America.

Perhaps the biggest time-saving innovation that Western Grain has come up with is remote access via a smart phone. Now, with a couple of taps, they can load and unload crops, turn the dryer on or off and monitor moisture control.

"It used to be that farmers had to physically stand next to the grain dryer. With the remote system, it allows them to become more efficient," she said.

"Each customer specializes in a different type of grain. Some grow corn, others grow wheat. When they dry it, they want it to dry in the fastest time and with the best quality. During the harvest, everybody has a very tight schedule. You can dry 24-7. We are trying to improve the quality of their lives to assist the process of grain drying and at the same time maintain the highest yields and protein levels."

Wallack said while traditional manufacturers are facing tremendous challenges and slimmer margins, Western Grain has been able to stay on the cutting edge of technology, all the while employing a workforce of less than 20 people. It also does product design and development, technical support and final assembly.

But just because Western Grain has got to this point with a relatively small staff doesn't mean Wallack isn't looking to hire. She's looking to attract young people who have graduated from post-secondary institutions and who want to gain experience in mechanical, heating, electrical, programming, artificial intelligence, deep machine learning, sales, marketing, customer service and business administration.

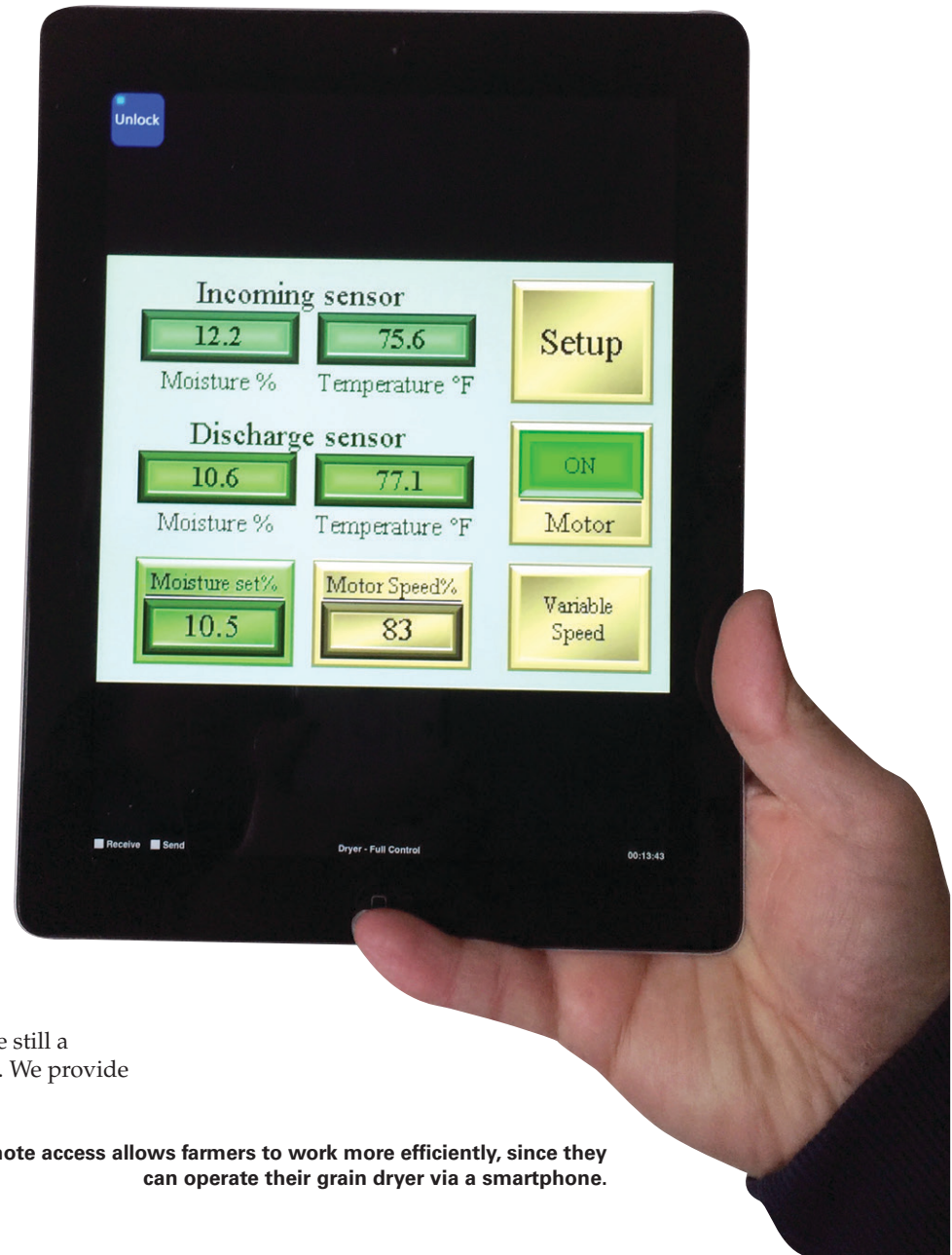
"We manufacture large machinery but we're still a smaller company. We think smaller is better. We provide

opportunities from concept design to building simulators and prototypes to working on the actual equipment. You can participate in all aspects of the business from the ground up and be a leader in the industry relatively quickly rather than working for a larger corporation," she said.

Wallack takes great pride in the company's mechanical design and automation systems, which make for what every farmer wants — consistent performance.

"(That) makes Western Grain Dryer brands similar to luxury sports cars such as Ferrari, Mercedes or Audi," she said. ■

Learn more at www.westerngraindryer.com.



Remote access allows farmers to work more efficiently, since they can operate their grain dryer via a smartphone.