Heads may turn when they see the “Darth Harvester” rumbling across a corn field.

Local producer Scott McPheeters and his son, Clark, and son-in-law Ryan Sukraw have created a special device that is fairly efficient at picking up downed corn in ridge till from an October windstorm.

Called the “Darth Harvester,” from the Star Wars movies, the device—mounted on a combine—can pick about four acres per hour on average, McPheeters said.

That’s about twice as fast as farmers using V-rakes, pick-up bean heads and other equipment, he said, but only about 20% to 30% as quick as a combine in a normal harvest situation.

Under usual conditions, combines can pick 10-15 acres per hour, McPheeters said.

As the combine rolls through the field, he said one of two wheel rakes sweep the corn down one side of a ridge.

The following wheel rake then lifts and releases the corn to a belted pickup head. From there, it’s transported into a platform head and finally gathered into the combine.

When the corn is taken to bins and dumped, McPheeters said a powerful aeration fan blows off dust to clean the grain before it’s stored in bins.

The food-grain corn is sold to Frito-Lay.

The farmer said he decided to go after some of the downed grain because of good prices.

Other corn, damaged or lost in the windstorm, has been covered by insurance.

The trio came up with the design and built the equipment in about three weeks.

The farmers started using the Darth Harvester on Nov. 26 and hope to finish picking corn by the end of the week.

“It’s worked surprisingly well,” McPheeters said, noting that other farmers have been interested in the machinery.

However one drawback is the amount of plant material that is lifted into the combine which means more cleaning and repairs, he said.

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