Should a custom harvester be harvesting your forage?

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2009 Dairy Forage Toolbox Seminar
Introduction

Digmans

Wepners

Which one is right? - Both!
Introduction

Why the Wepners work with a custom harvester:

- Focus on core expertise/interests
  - Milking, feeding, breeding & animal health

Limited labor resources
Why the Digmans harvest their own forage:

1. Not willing to give up control
2. Good source of intermittent labor
3. Additional farm enterprise
Advantages of utilizing a custom harvester

- Consistent forage - high level of capitalization
- Seasonal labor - labor needs don't interfere with dairy operations
- Latest technology - kernel processing, inoculant application, yield mapping
Advantages of harvesting your own forage

Advantages of going it alone

- In control of harvest
- Utilize on-farm labor
- Love the work
Hay and Forage Grower Survey

Hay & Forage Grower Survey:

1. E-mail survey - 80 responses
2. Overall satisfaction - 8/10
   - Dependability
   - Communication
   - Feed quality
   - Skill of employees
Hay and Forage Grower Survey

Feed Quality

- Same: 51%
- Improved: 41%
- Declined: 8%

Source: Hay and Forage Grower, 2002
Feed Cost

- Same: 58%
- Lower: 18%
- Higher: 14%
- No Response: 10%

Source: Hay and Forage Grower, 2002
Getting started with a custom harvester

First Step - Know your production costs

- Keep good records (time, fuel & lubrication, repair & maintenance)
- Work with a financial planner

Available resources:

- Your county agriculture agent:
  http://www.uwex.edu/ces/cty/

- UWEX machinery cost publication:
  http://learningstore.uwex.edu/pdf/A3510.pdf

- UWM spreadsheet:
  http://www.apec.umn.edu/faculty/wlazarus/tools.html

- UWM financial database:
  http://www.finbin.umn.edu/
Getting started with a custom harvester

USDA-NASS
Custom Rate Guide:

- Average rates and ranges
- Rate data organized by:
  - 9 districts
  - 3 regions
- Good starting point - not official estimates
Getting started with a custom harvester

Getting to know a custom harvester:

- Ask for references
- Be prepared to give references
- Share cropping plans, field layouts (obstructions)
Maintain a mutually beneficial partnership

Building a relationship with a custom harvester:

- Have written contact
- Stick with your harvester
  - Knows fields
  - Season scheduling
- Pay on-time
- Communicate
  - Crop conditions
  - Change in acreage
  - Complaints
Maintain a mutually beneficial partnership

Be careful not to be penny-wise and pound-foolish!

1. Custom harvesters don’t stop for milking

2. Packing/bagging capacity must match harvester
For more information visit the Team Forage website:
http://www.uwex.edu/ces/crops/uwforage/uwforage.htm