Should a custom harvester be harvesting your forage?

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2009 Dairy Forage Toolbox Seminar
Which one is right? - Both!
Why the Wepners work with a custom harvester:

1. Focus on core expertise/interests
   - Milking, feeding, breeding & animal health
2. 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 & Forage Grower Survey:

1. E-mail survey - 80 responses
2. Overall satisfaction - 8/10
   - Dependability
   - Communication
   - Feed quality
   - Skill of employees
Feed Quality

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

Source: Hay and Forage Grower, 2002
Hay and Forage Grower Survey

Feed Cost

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

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

First Step - Know your production costs

1. Keep good records (time, fuel & lubrication, repair & maintenance)
2. Work with a financial planner
3. 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
Forage Resources

Harvesting and Storage

Silage Harvesting & Equipment

- Forage Harvester Adjustments
  by Matt Digman, UW Extension Ag Engineer, Wisconsin Crop Manager, September, 2009
- Minimizing Wheel Traffic Damage to Alfalfa
  A Focus on Forage:field and field studies by Dan Undersander, UW Extension Forage Agronomist
- Adjusting the Conditioning System on a Mower-Conditioner
  by Dr. Ron Schuler, UW Extension Ag Engineer
- Swath Width and Mower Conditioners
  by Dr. Ron Schuler, Wisconsin Crop Manager, May, 2006
- Drying Forage for Hay and Haylage
  by Dan Undersander, UW Extension Forage Agronomist, Wisconsin Crop Manager, April, 2006
- Adjusting the Forage Harvester for Corn Silage Particle Size
  by Dr. Ron Schuler, UW Extension Ag Engineer
- Rakes and Mergers
  by Dr. Ron Schuler, UW Extension Ag Engineer
- Soil Compaction in Alfalfa Fields
  A PowerPoint presentation by Dr. Ron Schuler, UW Extension Ag Engineer
- Crop Processor Adjustment for Corn Silage
  by Dr. Ron Schuler, UW Extension Ag Engineer
- Estimating the Weight of Forage in a Forage Wagon
  by Dan Undersander, Kernel Resources Alg. Two station—“A Focus on Forage” field study
- Harvest and Storage of High-Quality Corn Silage for Dairy Cows
  PowerPoint by Dr. Randy Shaver, UW Extension Dairy Scientist
- Corn Silage Harvest Management
  by Dr. Randy Shaver, UW Extension Forage Agronomist and Dr. Kevin Shinners, UW Ag Engineer
- Machinery Designs and Adjustments for Minimized Field Losses
  by Dr. Ron Schuler, UW Extension Ag Engineer
- Bale Harvesting & Equipment

- Bale Storage Losses: how different options stack up
  by Craig Saxe, Juneau County Agricultural Agent, A “Focus on Forage” Fact Sheet

For more information visit the Team Forage website:
http://www.uwex.edu/ces/crops/uwforage/uwforage.htm