

Catching up with Roland Harvesting

Wednesday, June 15

As most of you all know, harvest can be ridiculously busy and crazy at times—more like most of the time. Needless to say that that's how this summer has been for Roland Harvesting. I'd like to give you all a recap of our season thus far so everyone can be caught up with us.

We made it to Altus, Okla., on May 22. I led the convoy with the pickup and a header trailer so that I could scout out the best route and watch for road construction and narrow bridges. Jason followed behind me and drove one of the semis hauling a CR combine and a header attached behind the combine trailer. Brandon was next in the line with the other semi hauling the CR on a combine trailer and a grain trailer attached behind that. This was Brandon's first time hauling a "big rig" and with the help of the rest of the crew he was quite successful. James followed up the rear of the caravan with the service truck and a grain trailer so that he could call out traffic coming around Brandon. Dad stayed at home for a couple days to finish up some work at the farm as we headed south. He drove straight through all night and met up with us in Altus.

We worked in the Altus area, around the towns of Gould, Duke, Hollis, and El Dorado. Like most of the areas in the South, these fields had endured harsh drought

during the growing season and due to the lack of moisture, yields were considerably lower than usual. Unfortunately, most of the fields made anywhere between 8 to 20 bushels per acre. For this being our first stop of the season, things went fairly smoothly for us during this time. Like usual, it took us all a couple days to "get all the rust out of the combines" and for us to fall back into our daily routines. We had a few minor breakdowns with a tire blowing out on Dad's draper header and a leveling bolt breaking on Brandon's header. However, both were fixed in a mannerly fashion and luckily did not cause us very much grief.

Thursday, June 16

Once we finished up in Altus, Okla., we moved north of Forth Worth, Texas, on May 30. It was pretty tough and slow cutting during this stop.

Last year the farmer had grown cotton in these fields and had planted this year's wheat crop on top of it using a no-till planter. The wheat fields had many cotton stalks sticking up above the actual wheat and this presented many tricky tasks for us. We had to adjust and modify the combine settings to process the excess cotton stalks that came in with the wheat. It was a challenging process to master but once the combines were adjusted properly things went a little more smoothly for us.

We were also faced with the challenge of trying to work in a small agriculture spot that was completely surrounded by a metropolitan area. All of the wheat we cut was hauled on a four-lane road into Fort Worth. James did much of the hauling and said that traffic was absolutely terrible and he would hit bumper-to-bumper traffic almost every time he took a load of wheat into the grain elevator.

The only major breakdown we had in

Texas was when a feeder house chain broke on Dad's combine. Jason had to go into Dallas to get the new chain and due to the travel time and effort it took to fix it, the combine was down for most of the day. When there is standing, ripe, dry wheat ready to be harvested and your combine is broken down in the field, the feelings of anxiety and frustration always settle in. However, breakdowns are part of harvest and what's important is being able to repair them efficiently and quickly as possible so that the combine can get up and running and get back to cutting wheat.

Friday, June 17

On June 2, Brandon and Jason loaded up with one CR combine and header, grain trailer and service truck. They moved up around the Enid, Okla., area and began working on a job near the towns of Carmen and Alva. Brandon also turned 19 years old on June 2, and he was very grateful that the couple they were working for brought him out a surprise fried chicken dinner and shortcake to celebrate his birthday! I think Brandon and Jason were extremely thankful for their generosity.

The next day Brandon and Jason cut almost 200 acres with just the one CR and one semi. They were up bright and early and worked late into the night, unloading on the go with the semi all day and managing to avoid breakdowns as well. As many of you know, having such a successful day like that does not always happen and when it does it's one of the best feelings anyone can have on harvest. Still being a college student, I would say that it's easily comparable to acing a test.

Meanwhile, Dad and James continued to finish up in Texas and I came home during this time for a prior family obligation. Most of the wheat in the Fort Worth area yielded around 20 to 35 bushels per acre. On June 4,

Dad and James finished and loaded up the header and combine in record time. James said it took just 19 minutes to load it all, chain it down, put up signs, and get on the road. On June 5, Dad and James made it to Oklahoma and the crew was finally reunited and cutting in the same field. We unloaded on the go with the semis, which saved a substantial amount of time. Most of these fields made around 25 to 35 bushels per acre. The farmer was quite disappointed, mentioning that these fields typically make at least 40 to 55 bushels per acre during most years. However, these yields were expected given the dry year that certainly took a toll on this area, as it did on most of the South.

Saturday, June 18

This past weekend, we loaded up all together and moved to Pratt, Kan. Along with about five other crews sitting in town, we are all waiting on green wheat to ripen up in the area. For the past few days we have been checking over all of the equipment and making some minor repairs as we have run across them.

Jason and James have also been doing maintenance work on the semis and trailers. They now have them in peak condition to continue our season—hopefully with no problems from here on out! Dad, Brandon, and I have also been driving around the area looking at fields and trying to figure out what our new game plan is. After being in contact with our farmers from the Great Bend, Kan., area it sounds like things could be ready to cut there in the next few days so we might be heading that direction soon. I guess we will just have to wait and see where our next harvest adventure will commence.

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The Forth Worth, Texas farmer planted wheat into cotton stalks. This took a little bit of adjustment on our part, but we managed the challenge.

A little rain makes a lot of difference

Monday, June 20

American Quality Harvesting moved to eastern Kansas last Tuesday and Wednesday. Most of the east side of Kansas has had a considerable amount of rainfall this season—and it shows. The yields have been averaging from 40 to 65 bushels per acre and the test weights have been as high as 64 pounds. The wheat is waist high in most places, and we aren't forced to run our headers on the ground to get all the wheat.

In this area, often broadcast lespedeza grass seed is in the wheat crop. (The crop is Korean lespedeza—not its noxious weed counterpart *Sericea lespedeza*.) The lespedeza is about a foot tall right now, so we must keep our headers above the grass and below the low-lying wheat heads in order to get all of the wheat, but not damage the growing secondary grass crop. In September we'll return to harvest the lespedeza and our client will clean it and sell it as a forage seed and soil saver for pastures.

Thunderstorms moved in on Saturday and rained us out. I'd be willing to bet that our fellow harvesters in the central part of Kansas are glad to see rain go somewhere else for a change. It seems they have been getting all the rain lately and the harvest progression has slowed because of it.

The rain allowed a relaxing Father's Day. It's the first time I can ever remember Dad not being on a combine. The down day allowed the crew to sleep in a little and get some preventive maintenance taken care of. They'll head out to the field later today and see if the fields have dried out yet. The lespedeza growing means we can't jump into the fields too soon or we will damage the grass seed by compacting the crop with our tire tracks.

We're about 45 percent done with this job and provided there are no further delays we'll be loading up to make the trek to northwest Kansas.

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Some of the equipment (top photo) waits patiently for the move to our next job.



Just like an elementary school field trip, (photo left), the guys all grab a sack lunch for the road on their way to their rigs. Mom's had lots of practice preparing "on-the-go" meals over the years.



A combine prepares to move to the next field while another machine finishes the last strip of wheat in the background. Our clients always want to keep their fields "separate" meaning you don't carry over grain from one field to another for insurance and rent purposes.



Kevin completes a pre-trip inspection and fills out his log book prior to departure.

Miseners cutting wheat in Kansas

Tuesday, June 14

It was a little damp near Andale, Kan., and surrounding areas this past weekend and it was obviously too wet to harvest. I'm glad there was rain on Saturday night, because that meant Sunday was a day for relaxation. The Miseners always try to take Sunday a little easier, but in this line of work that doesn't always happen. We do make sure we always get to church and not start work before noon, but if something is threatening that crop—it comes first.

When a farmer's livelihood is on the line and we're holding the reins, we do our best to get the job done efficiently and well. When the storms threaten we need to be able to get the crop out before the storms hit. It really is amazing how much risk the

farmers of America—and everywhere—have to take in order to make a living. It makes me respect them that much more. Remember to thank farmers for taking that risk to provide food for your table.

Thursday, June 16

We're cutting wheat in Andale, Kan., and I may have said this before, but I am so glad to be cutting good wheat again. This is what wheat is suppose to look like. The wheat around here so far is averaging around 40 bushels per acre. The moisture is right on the verge of being too wet at 12.4 percent, but the test weight is what we've been seeing even in Oklahoma at 61 pounds.

Friday, June 17

Rain has come to Andale, Kan. This past week storm clouds have been rolling in trying to shut us down every day. This is definitely a change from what we've seen in Oklahoma where we would do just about anything for a little moisture.

Yesterday was a stressful day. We had a combine engine working after breaking down last year, and it ran like a hot knife through butter in Oklahoma. When we got to Kansas we noticed something wasn't quite right. We were able to diagnose oil getting into the water.

Water getting into the oil is a serious issue, but at least we know it's not the engine that is the problem. Until we have time to figure out exactly what the root of

the problem is we'll keep going on with what we know will not hurt the engine. We've been changing the water in the radiator, flushing it out and cleaning the oil out as best we can every day—sometimes twice a day—until we can get the issue resolved.

We had a late last night trying to get the wheat harvested before the rain hit. We ran until midnight and on the last round one of our combine headers drive shaft broke. This means the head is not in working condition until we can find some parts. It's a real good thing that we are having a rain delay today so we can play catch up and make repairs.

Typically we have quick breakdowns like guards, sections, or a bearing here and there. Overall we're normally pretty lucky and stay up and running. We have a moving service truck stocked with inventory of the parts we may need on the road. We even had a part that a local dealership did not. We try to carry everything that our combine might need so that we can keep our breakdown time at a minimum. We can't carry every single part, so we do have to rely on a dealership once in a while.

We are living up to the Custom Harvesters name by flying by the seat of our pants and going with the flow of things. Yesterday was interesting. We fixed the shaft that broke on the head, we did our regular service work on the machines and were ready to hit the field when the rain hit. It only rained for about an hour and then the sun came shining through. The combination

of sunshine and gusty wind dried out the wheat enough to cut in just three hours. The moisture was around 15 percent when we started, and I'm sure you're thinking that 15 was too wet, and I suppose you're right—but the farmer we're cutting for said that if we could thrash it through the combine and the elevator would take it, he wanted to cut it. So we cut.

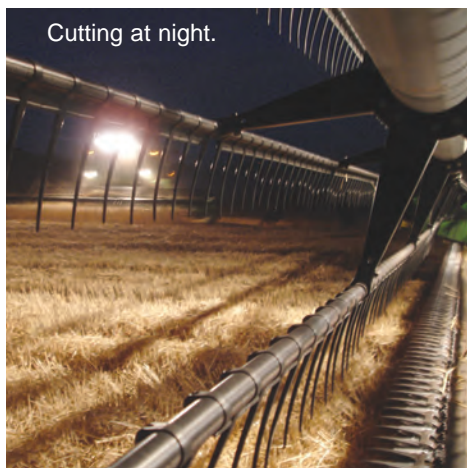
This is one of those times where we are thankful to run walker machines, so we can cut the wet, green tinted straw. If we were to run a rotary combine I'm not so sure we would have cut yesterday because it would be tough getting it through the machine.

We're hoping to start cutting around two o'clock, or at least sample so we know where we are at. In order to be a harvester it takes tremendous patience and great faith in God. We just have to adapt and be ready when the wheat is ready.

Sunday, June 19

We're still in Andale, Kan., and it has been a constant battle with rain. With all the moisture we've been going through some mud. Small towns like this one are the heart and soul of wheat country. I always enjoy stops in towns like this because of the character each town has. However, don't blink when you drive through—you just might miss it.

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Cutting at night.

Hoffmans hit by hail, spend time in a tornado shelter



Adam and Adreas power wash off the combine.

Wednesday, June 15

Hoffman Harvesting wrapped up their tour in the Pratt area last night.

Today we are blowing off machinery and power washing it to get it nice and clean. We are also greasing it and loading it up so it is ready to go when we are. We are ridding it of any weeds so we don't spread any disease to the next farmer. However, I must say we like it to look clean too. Nothing looks better than a parade of clean equipment moving down the road.

Friday, June 17

Hail hit Pratt last night. I am glad we were able to get the wheat crop in, but I am hoping the hail didn't do too much damage to the fall crop. We were wishing for rain in the area but it unfortunately came in form we didn't want.



Hail fell in Pratt, Kan., June 16.

We were going to move to Scott City yesterday but decided to wait until today as we had some unfinished business to attend to. I am wishing we would have missed out on the storm. Did I mention there is rarely a dull moment during harvest?

Hoffman Harvesting had a rather interesting night of bad weather. We woke up to find hail damage on our campers and the vehicles that pull them. It sounds like our farmer Ross also sustained some hail damage on some of his corn fields. I am sad to hear it but even more glad we were able to get his wheat crop in before the hail hit.

After discovering the hail hit our homes, we headed to the location where we parked our equipment. We were glad to see we didn't have any hail damage but soon found another problem—



Clouds went from pretty fluffy white to black in what seemed a matter of minutes.

some of our loaded equipment got stuck. Rain was not forecasted for our area and the stuck equipment wasn't parked where it should have been. We had to unload our grain cart to pull out two trucks. What a mess it left! I bet the crew learned a lesson. We fixed the ground to the best of our capabilities and headed out of town.

Much to our dismay, we soon discovered there was a bike race headed down the same path we were taking. Wide loads, narrow roads and bicyclists made our trip more challenging than it normally would have been. Doesn't our day sound like a game of "Farmopoly"? Anyone play that? These are all scenarios that would happen in the game if there was a harvest version.

We were happy to park in Dighton, a happy ending to an eventful day.

Sunday, June 19

Happy Father's Day. Here's a little Father's Day humor to "you," no matter what you're called: "First they call you dada, then they call you daddy, then they call you dad, then they call you collect."

This day never seems to be celebrated at the same stop each year. We've celebrated as far down as Texas and far up as Colorado. What's funny is this day helps mark where we are on our route each year. Last year we were in Kiowa, Kan. The year we were in Texas, I made my dad brownies and bought Dairy Queen ice cream to go with it. You just remember weird tidbits like that.

Last night found us in the tornado shelter. One minute we were grilling and hanging out and then clouds quickly moved in and it was black out. Soon we saw a convoy of harvesters—sans equipment—heading out of the campground toward the tornado shelter. Convinced that wasn't too bad of an idea, we too sought shelter in the Dighton Methodist Church. Some harvesters there were Hoerner Harvesting and Olsen Custom Farming.

Weather has been crazy this year!

The Dighton harvest has yet to get started. Yesterday, a drive to Garden City gave us a glimpse of some fields that still had green heads in them. Some harvesters plan to try the crop tomorrow but rains are being forecasted once again. Tonight we plan to celebrate Father's Day by grilling out. Hopefully, we can finish without a trip to the tornado shelter!

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Due to unforecasted rains, we had to unload the grain cart to pull out the service truck and a truck with a train on it. Where you park matters with this heavy equipment.

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