

American Quality harvesters hurry up and wait

Monday, August 1

Fellow harvesters and friends often refer to custom harvesting as a lifestyle. Although I do agree that it is a unique lifestyle, I would also say that it's a tough business. The agriculture industry, and farming, is known to be physically demanding as many people still envision laborers out in the fields harvesting crops with hand scythes or riding cableless machinery tilling the land. However few people outside of the industry also acknowledge the entrepreneurial skills required by farmers and custom harvesters alike.

Harvesters run a business, and like all businesses—they have to be productive and yield a profit at the end of the season in order to pay the bills. It seems like a simple concept, but sometimes the weather makes that difficult to accomplish. When it rains for 10, 15, or 20 days straight, it makes it tough to harvest any grain and generate revenue while the bills like payroll, trailer parking, meals, and equipment payments continue to accumulate. Other factors such as hailstorms or droughts that wipe out an entire crop at a big stop can also impede harvesters financially. One thing is for certain—when the crops are ripe, they must be harvested no matter the weather conditions. Harvesters must orchestrate half million dollar pieces of machinery around each field and over farms across the country. Crew managers must have the means to set up,

maintain, and service their machinery as well as the technology within. Many machines are equipped with several computers and technology more sophisticated than that found in homes today. Their job becomes even more complicated when trying to facilitate the operation of several of these machines at the same time, in some cases—a dozen or more machines operating in one field.

In our business, we find ourselves practicing the “hurry up and wait” business approach quite frequently. There's always a sense of urgency to get the crop out and we do our best to harvest each of our jobs as quickly as possible. Dad always said, “I'd rather be tired than be waiting on the last 40 acres to dry out after a big rain,” referencing the long hours we work. Part of this philosophy comes from the constant push to get to the next stop on our harvest trail. All harvesters map out locations that correlate with their other stops and try to fill their entire season full of harvesting. However, as weather patterns fluctuate from year to year, so does the harvesting window at each of those stops. On a normal year, one might be able to harvest three stops in Kansas, one in Colorado, and then make it to South Dakota without ever having to split up the crew and machinery to harvest multiple locations at one time. That's the ideal case and we've been fortunate again this season that it worked out well for us. Although it has worked out, we've been pushing to get moved to the next stop all season. Part of this rush can be attributed to our farmers at each of the next stops getting anxious to see us arrive in his or her yard to harvest the crop.

Sometimes the anxiety of getting the crop out is a little premature just as it was at our current stop near Mitchell, S.D. We arrived there from Pierre this past Tuesday and had to wait a couple of days for the green wheat to ripen in order to begin harvesting. This is just another simple example of all of the things a custom harvester must organize and work around in his business.

Since getting in the fields, we've encountered some wet ground conditions after the 5" rain last week. However, we've been getting along well with our high flotation equipment and have managed to harvest 1,000 acres of 60-bushel wheat. The test



The crew poses for a picture after dinner.

weights have been running around 58 to 61 pounds. Our crew will be at this job site throughout the first week of August before we'll begin looking for more work in South and North Dakota as our jobs in North Dakota won't be ready yet. It's hard to believe August has already arrived and that the 2011 wheat harvest will soon be coming to a close. Although we don't currently have a job lined up after this stop, we're still in hurry up mode because we don't want to risk having a storm damage any of the wheat crop we're harvesting right now. There's rarely a time to relax in this business.

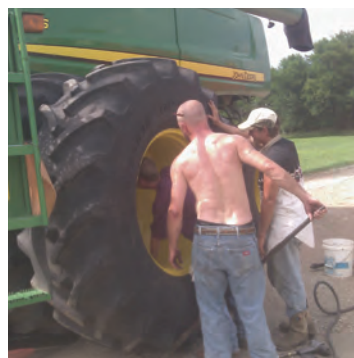
It's a tough lifestyle that you just have to love to do. We haven't even mentioned working around a limited work force, complying with the Department of Transportation for each state, or suffering major breakdowns or accidents yet either! Many harvesters say the stress and fast pace fuels them and the sights you see around the country while traveling and the satisfaction of harvesting someone's crop for them makes it all worthwhile. No doubt about it—it's a demanding business environment that requires living on the road, working long, hard hours, and planning for the unexpected.

As always, American Quality would like to thank our sponsors and followers for another great harvest season. God bless!

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Dalton waits on more bolts to fasten on the outside dual.



Garrett jumps in to line the bolt up in the hole.

Home harvest is history for Rolands

Thursday, August 4

On Monday we were able to reunite all three of our combines and what a glorious feeling it was! We were finishing up a job about 45 miles from home, in between the towns of Hay Springs and Rushville.

Monday night we were racing against a storm and rushing to finish a field before it rained. During the very last round the TR98 couldn't quite keep up with the newer CRs and the feeder house broke on it. Luckily we were able to finish the field just as it began to sprinkle but we were all bummed out the 98 broke down. Throughout all of home harvest the TR98 had been working extremely well for Mom and without the help of it we certainly would not have been able to get over all the acres we did.

For much of the time we were up in Hay Spring we were fighting breakdowns. Dad's combine had to be parked Sunday afternoon since it was having some major issues with the transmission. It was down for almost 48 hours and caused a lot stress for everyone. Once we found the repair bulletin issued by the company the entire problem turned out to be a bad electrical sensor in the transmission. After Dad figured this out it was an easy fix and he had the combine up and running

Tuesday morning. To our relief we wrapped up wheat harvest in the Hay Springs area Tuesday evening and began shuffling the machinery back home.

Wheat harvest in Nebraska is almost officially complete for Roland Harvesting. Overall, most of the dryland wheat in the Hemingford area ended up yielding between 30 to 50 bushels per acre, weighing around 59 to 62 pounds per bushel, and protein running right around 10 percent. In the Hay Springs area the test weights were slightly higher, most of which ranging from 61 to 63 pounds per bushel and protein averaging around 11 percent.

Wednesday morning we loaded up one of the CR combines, with one of the grain trailers hooked up behind the combine trailer. Brandon hauled this load and James led him with the pickup and header. They made the move to Thermopolis, Wyo., to begin harvesting barley that is ready in the area. Dad and I are tying up loose ends at home and picking up the rest of the mud holes. We will load up the other CR this afternoon and will hit the road bright and early tomorrow morning to join Brandon and James in Thermopolis.

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Dad unloads his combine into the semi.



Brandon blows off one of the combines with an air hose from the service truck.



(top) We had to cross this bridge on our move to Hay Springs. The outermost tire tracks didn't quite fit on the bridge. The dual tires on Brandon's combine hung over the edge and the drive tires on Dad's machine barely fit.

(bottom) Here's the view from inside the tractor as the grain cart was going across the bridge.



Mom sits on the back of the pickup and looks over the "ocean of wheat" we are about to harvest.



This is the massive pile of wheat that was dumped on the ground at the grain elevator in Hemingford during the last 15 days or so of harvest.

Home harvest is history for Rolands

(Continued from Page 10-B)

Saturday, August 6

Since we just finished harvesting near Hay Springs, Neb., I wanted to share a fun flashback from that area.

Not only does harvesting run on the Roland side of my family, but it actually traces back to my mom's side of the family as well. My uncle, Allen English, graduated from Hay Springs High School (located in northwestern Nebraska) in 1964. After graduation Uncle Al was in contact with a harvest crew run by Paul Schiffner and decided to join them on their harvest run for the summer. My Grandpa Fraser drove him to Alva, Okla., where the Schiffner crew began. They followed the harvest through the wheat belt and had many stops along the way through the states of Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska (bypassing South Dakota) and up into North Dakota, about 25 miles south of the Canadian border.

Uncle Al was a truck driver for the crew and returned the following summer, in 1965, for another harvest run. While they were cutting around Alva he accidentally wrecked a truck and the boss "let him go." After that Uncle Al hauled bails around the Kiowa, Kan., area for about two to three weeks until a local crew hired him on for the summer. He joined Charlie Sappington's crew, from Cordell, Okla., who ran two Gleaner combines. Uncle Al was

a combine operator for him all summer. This crew also followed the wheat harvest and even went into Wilson, N.D., to harvest malt barley.

In the summer of 1966 Uncle Al went back on harvest with the Sappington crew where they began in Cordell and worked their way north to Scranton, N.D. Uncle Al recalls living in an old school bus that had 4 bunks and a total of 8 beds in it. The bus had no shower, toilet or any sort of running water or electricity. A friend who owned the filling station in Scranton would hook up a shower in the back and let the crew clean up after hours. He also remembers bringing a bar of soap to Lake McConaughy near Ogallala, Nebraska to bathe after they finished working for the day.

Now, in his 60s, living in Colorado Springs and succeeding as a business man, Uncle Al still recalls the many fond memory of his harvest adventures.



Uncle Al was about 18 when this photo was taken when he was following the wheat harvest.

Hoffman Harvesting ready to cut spring wheat



Roly and Oak make one more pass to finish the field.

Monday, August 1

Today we wrapped up our winter wheat harvest in Gettysburg, S.D. We still have spring wheat to harvest but it isn't ready yet. Tomorrow two combines will head to the McLaughlin area to cut some wheat while the other two will head home to try to cut some of our spring wheat that is located farther west than our farm. It has the potential of being more ready than at home. Our spring wheat around our farm is just not ready yet.

Faulkton, Gettysburg, Hoven and Bowdle's spring wheat harvests have the potential of being ready at the same time. It is looking that when go time comes around again, we will once again be here, there, and everywhere. In the meantime, we will test the wheat out west and do some needed maintenance on our machinery. But you know, as I often say, plans change.

Tuesday, August 2

Today Johan and James did some servicing on some of our machinery while the rest of the crew (Callum, Roly, Oak, and Moses) headed west to cut some wheat. They left early to make the 200-mile move. Things are just getting started but they are reporting yields in the 35 to 45 range. I followed Johan and James as they changed the oil filters, oil and gassed up the remaining two machines. Hopefully these machines will be back in the field cutting spring wheat in the next couple of days.

Wednesday, August 3

Hoffman Harvesting is at home awaiting the spring wheat to ripen in the Gettysburg/Bowdle/Faulkton areas. Today, Leon, James and Johan took a test spin west of our farm but didn't have any luck. The wheat was too wet to be cut and do a good job. The wheat was wet but the combine showed yields of 50 to 75 bushels per acre. It looks like the area's spring wheat will be promising.

The guys who are combining spring wheat out west in the Lemmon area are bumping green wheat. The moisture is around 13 percent and test weights are 60. The yields are ranging from the 20s to 40s and the wheat has a protein of 15.7. They received rain about 2 p.m. and had to quit. Hopefully, the rain will help the green wheat ripen.

Friday, August 5

Hoffman Harvesting just got rained out. Yesterday our crew that was cutting in Lemmon moved back to Gettysburg to begin cutting spring wheat, while the crew on the farm was able to start harvesting our spring wheat. Unfortunately, things were put to a stop as we are getting rained out in both places. In Bowdle they were cutting wheat yielding in the 40s with a test weight of 60 prior to the rainfall. The protein was 15.

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The trucks are unloaded and ready for the day in Genoa, Colo.



A combine dumps on the go as the sun goes down.



(left) The oil drains into this handy contraption on wheels.



(right) James brings the gear he used back down.

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