



## Are you really ready for the harvest this year?

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Many farmers may have the potential to cut hundreds (possibly thousands) of dollars off their harvest bill each season. **HOW? By being well prepared for the upcoming silage and hay harvest.**

### **What is the cost of poor preparation?**

Many contractors are charging high rates per tonne or per hour (\$500 - \$800/hour) for high capacity forage harvesters and justifiably so, given the high cost of their equipment. At those charge rates, that machine sitting idle in the paddock for half an hour, costs \$250 - \$400!

Each hour of downtime is equivalent to the cost of one to two tonnes of concentrates or fodder purchased in poor seasons. That \$250 could have bought one tonne of a concentrate at 12 megajoules of metabolisable energy per kilogram dry matter (MJ ME/kg DM or ME) and using 8 ME (conservative conversion rate) to produce one litre of milk at \$0.40 per litre could conservatively return over \$540 as milk to a dairy farmer. Now do the sums for what your contractor is charging these days and see the “hidden” loss.

So this downtime may be costing you twice the harvesting charge rate? If downtime adds up to several hours over the whole harvest period then work out that cost, OR rather, the potential for savings!

Although loader wagon contractors charge less the above comments still count, just at a lower cost.

### **Where can savings be made?**

**1. Harvest on time.** For various reasons many farmers do not service their mower, rake, forager, etc. until the day or so before harvest. Problems such as worn or cracked parts can be overlooked in a rushed maintenance check, or harvest is delayed some days because the dealer has to order in the required parts.

For every 7 – 10 days delay in harvest after the ryegrass start to head, digestibility decreases 3 – 5 percentage units and crude protein by 1 – 3 percentage units! This drop off is even worse for the sub-tropical or tropical type grasses.

Even 3 – 4 days represents quality loss which is a milk production loss which is a \$\$\$ loss! So there's the first saving! Throw in rain delays so that the first opportunity to harvest is missed and there's more \$\$\$ lost.

### **2. Fast and safe access to the storage area**

If the laneways and/or gateways are narrow, or badly pot-holed, this slows down the delivery of chopped forage to the stack and turn-around time back to for the forage harvester. If there are no extra carts available or there are bottle necks when the carts meet half way down narrow laneways, these all stop the forager working. Avoiding this is another opportunity to save \$\$\$\$.

Have laneways and gateways graded smoothly. Have new laneways built wider or possibly a section that allows passing. Consider cutting fences or dropping sleepers over electric fences to enable the carts to travel across the paddocks to the storage site. Have easy access into and around the stack area with clear visibility to avoid accidents.

### **3. Clear paddocks and have obstacles well marked**

How often does a machine breakdown because it has hit an unmarked stump, wombat hole or post? How often are there delays due to wire or tree limbs being caught in the mower or steel electric fence posts being picked up by precision chop forage harvesters,

Delayed mowing may result in forage being cut at a slightly later maturity and delayed spreading may require an extended period of wilting to meet the target dry matter content. This extended wilting period will cost someone substantial dollars!

What about the impact on the contractor who has you penned in for a certain start date, along with the other five farmers around that time! Nor will I put on a cost of the possibility of injury to yourself or your worker (broken wrist or worse), and the cost if that person is out of action as a result, AND at the worst time of year! What about the potential for legal action by a contractor or worker for lack of “duty of care?”

I won't even mention being caught by rain (again) because the harvest is delayed but this is a “hidden” cost that is never factored in.

### **4. Train your operators well**

How often do you hear that the most important job of harvest is the raking and/or the rolling of the stack? How often are these jobs done by the least experienced person? Listen to the guy on the baler or forager trying to pick up poorly formed windrows. This slows down harvesting significantly, often resulting in stops to clear pick ups, broken shear bolts or belts, all wasting time and costing \$\$\$\$.

How many “near death” experiences occur on the tops of silage stacks, especially at night, due to inexperience, lack of clear visibility, poor tractor lighting, blinding from delivery transports, no side protection on the tops of bunkers, etc. Since accidents causing severe injury must be reported, WorkCover agencies will then visit you very promptly and very vigorously inspect your activities and machinery for occupational health and safety aspects. Potentially a severe cost to your enterprise?

Please think about the above, and the many other considerations not discussed. Be prepared well in advance of harvest and save some money!