

CUSTOM BALER REUBEN WOOD turns out around 20,000 large square bales and up to 200,000 small square bales annually. But he doesn't think in quantity. "My Dad told me every bale I make is an individual product," he says. "Somebody is going to buy it. You want it to be the best it can be."

Wood listened, and his customers appreciate his attention to details. They raise alfalfa, ryegrass and bermudagrass for livestock feed, and barley for straw. Their customers, in turn, range from feed stores to construction companies, as well as dairies, both in the U.S. and overseas.

While it is up to the growers to provide well-managed, weed-free forage, Wood is in charge of cutting, swathing, windrowing, raking and baling—all in a timely manner. And while timing may not be everything, for quality hay it's close.

For instance, for dairy-quality alfalfa, Wood, who operates out of Palo Verde, Ariz., and has been in the

flake all at once into the bale chamber for the final compression. This method does not leave the corners of the bale unfinished, and the hay doesn't take a thrashing, leaving more leaf intact and in the bale, not on the outside of the baler or on the ground.

"Those bales are solid squares, not shaped like a banana," Ocock continues. "They're more defined and retain a lot more leaf." This, he adds, allows for better quality as well as a better fit for the trucks that transport the bales, especially the large squares, to domestic customers or to port for the growing export market.

The Hesston 2170 balers "are also a pleasure to drive," says Wood, noting his two balers can cover an average of 150 acres in 2½ hours, and spit out forty 3- x 4-foot top quality bales an hour.

There is a reason the balers can do their job in a hurry. "It is the design of the machine," says Tony Glaspie, service manager for Empire. "Everything from

the size and speed of the pick-up to the packing is designed for high volume and so the crops will flow straight through."

Wood also gives the Hesston 2170 XD balers high marks for dependability. "We've had hardly anything for breakdowns, maybe a bearing and a couple of filters."

That wasn't the case before he bought the Hesston models. "We used Krones balers. We spent between \$30,000 and \$50,000 on repairs each year. They were an absolute nightmare. When they broke, they broke big time. We had a gearbox go bad, couldn't buy the parts and had to get a new gearbox. That was \$38,000."

Wood says, "They are so expensive to operate. I'll be two years paying off the parts bill."

In addition to the company's balers, Wood gives high marks to other Hesston by Massey Ferguson equipment, such as the company's windrowers. He used to run John Deere swathers, he says, but they were susceptible to cracking and breaking. Of late, he's been running two Hesston by Massey Ferguson 9635 windrowers and has a Hesston 9770 on order.

According to Wood, other than the all-nighters, the only other part of work he doesn't like is that there isn't enough of it. He says the small dairies and forage growers are going out of business, and the big dairies are getting bigger and buying their own hay equipment.

"It is so easy to run a baler; anybody can do it," he says. Maybe, but not with Wood's philosophy of quality, one bale at a time. **FL**

TIME

Even though he cranks out 200,000-plus bales of hay a year, this custom bundler says quality is still paramount.

business for some 43 years, says the forage needs to be cut at 28-day intervals to provide the optimum balance between quality and quantity. "It takes us 4 to 5 days to dry it down and bale it," he adds.

The magic spot is 15% moisture—dry enough not to mold but moist enough to retain those protein-packed leaves. "We chase moisture all the time," says Wood. In arid Arizona, that means little sleep and good headlights. "Usually, it hits 15% between 3 and 5 a.m. We may work all day and have to leave for the next farm at 10 p.m. at night. That's seven days a week."

Understandably, to meet such demanding expectations—he works about 3,000 acres in an average month—Wood expects a lot out of his equipment. He says he gets that and more with his Hesston by Massey Ferguson balers, including five Hesston 4690 small square balers and two new Hesston 2170 XD large square balers.

He says the balers are fast and low-maintenance, yet provide high-quality bales. "They're nice and quiet, easy to run," says Wood "and they make a square bale, a consistent bale . . . with nice, tight twine and no broken bales. We plan on having them a long time."

Craig Ocock, account manager of Empire Southwest, Wood's equipment dealer, explains the secret to these high-quality bales: "The Hesston design builds it one flake at a time, then feeds the entire