

Cutters

The window for each farm's harvest is impossibly short, so the days for these traveling crews are proportionately long. They're in the fields as early as the grain is dry and often work into the night, headlights on their combines and trucks lighting up an otherwise pitch landscape. When they can't dodge them, they ride out the region's infamous storms in places where there is often no cover. The work itself is dangerous, too, with tired crews running potentially hazardous equipment in a choreographed dance between close-running combines and grain carts, ditches and headland fences.

But the money is good, or at least it is some

years. Others, not so much. Yet season after season, the custom cutters keep harvesting. This is part 1 of a 3-part series focusing on one such custom cutter, Kulhanek Harvesting, operated by Shorty Kulhanek, out of Colby, Kansas.

Why Kulhanek? For starters, he's been a Gleaner customer for almost three decades, and a passionate one at that. Still, it's Kulhanek's success and 45-year history as a custom cutter that sold us on him. In the next three issues, we'll take a look at his business, and through it we'll examine the state of American farming—its strengths and warts—and why its health and vitality are so critical to the rest of the planet.

