



much larger, that's a valuable feature. "A lot of people don't realize anything is available that they can pull with a tractor that small," says Suchomski.

"I don't need a big tractor to do farming with," says Thalman. "I've got my own tractor, and Jeff can match me up with equipment that will work with what I've got. It's a win-win situation."

Both Thalman and Hammann also have to travel over the road with their equipment to reach smaller patches of land they clear for neighbors. When he needs to be mobile, Hammann runs a Hesston 4550 square baler he purchased from Tom Lauf, of Lauf Equipment. "The square baler is built very compact compared to how it used to be built. It's narrower and still makes a better bale than the old balers did," Lauf says.

Extending behind the tractor, not out to the side, it's easier to transport too. "That makes it much safer to drive down the road," says Lauf. Also, "When Galen gets to the field, he doesn't have to swing the baler around. It's much easier for him to get around obstacles that way."

Thalman also likes the way his equipment handles in tight spots. "When I show you some of the places that I take hay off of, you'd think there's no way you could get your equipment in," he says. "I've got places up and down the road here with 4, 5 and 6 acres that I mow. And my equipment is small enough, I can just run right down the road." **FL**

*Thalman's daughter, Nicole Kirby, performs a training move with Mingo, one of six horses that lives on the family property.*

■ In addition to scarcity—and its offspring, price—many producers bale their own for reasons of quality. **IN OTHER WORDS, DOING IT RIGHT MEANS DOING IT YOURSELF.**

"The biggest advantage," Thalman says, "is that I can produce [hay] when it's ready to be cut—whenever it's in its prime."

Hammann agrees. In order to maximize quality, he tries to cut, bale and store the hay within a two-day window, with an average of one to two cuts each year. By doing it himself, he can do the work as soon as he needs to. That kind of flexibility ensures his feed is harvested when it's at the optimal nutrition level.

Then, there's just the simple dollars-and-sense financial benefit. "It's cheaper," he says, comparing growing his own to buying it. That's especially important to Hammann during years when the cost of hay has been at its highest.

"In 2012, hay was so expensive you couldn't even find it," he says. "But I was in good shape because I had one barn with 200 bales [harvested the previous year] I hadn't used yet. It was so dry that year, I ended up using that 200 bales and I didn't have to buy any hay."