

MINIMUM SCALE LOGGING

J.A. Larsen
N.Z. Farm Forestry Association

In presenting this paper some background of myself may be in order. I am a farmer with a small 4 ha ranch near Gisborne. I am also a mobile saw milling contractor, custom cutting for farmer clients on one hand while on the other buying small woodlots and marketing the sawn timber output to anybody who will buy. As well, any roundwood production in the area normally comes my way for peeling. I have an ongoing partnership or joint venture arrangement with a local farmer growing 40 ha of radiata, and I am the National Secretary of the N.Z. Farm Forestry Association.

Because I am involved with sawmilling I need logs. Since the East Coast region is traditionally a farming area and not forestry orientated (although this is likely to change in the future) logging contractors are not in abundance. By necessity I am involved with limited scale logging and have been for about the last decade with my own enterprise. More correctly you could term my operations 'minimum scale logging' as the volumes from any one site do not generally exceed 250 tonnes. To cover all my activities you could possibly call me a contracting farm forester with a broad overview of the industry.

Equipment Required

The only standard items required by any logging contractor are suitable chainsaws and a vehicle capable of providing all weather access to the logging site. The choices for both these items are many and varied, but I use a range of saws up to 100 cc rating depending on the size of tree being felled and a 4 wheel drive vehicle.

The machinery required for log extraction has been fairly well documented in various trade journals and publications but some factors which influence the choice and size of machines could be quickly summarised :

- knowledge of local soil and climatic conditions
- site of the woodlot
- volume of wood to be logged and piece size
- size of the log skids
- size of the logging gang
- log volumes required by the processor - is it a small local sawmill or an industrial coleslaw muncher?

The gear which suits my operations includes a log skidder and tracked log loader with a choice of 2 dozers as a back up if the conditions of the job and site dictate. I also have my own 6 wheeler truck for transport of machines, logs, timber or whatever.

Number of Logging Locations

The number of logging sites at which a contractor will work per year will depend on the factors mentioned already but there are also others :

- how many other logging contractors are already working in the area?
- what is the available resource ready for harvesting?
- can the downstream sawmiller and processor handle the volume and sell it?
- are log purchasers prepared to pay an acceptable price to the grower?
- what is the supply and demand for wood fibre in any shape or form and is this influenced by export prices and a crazy national financial climate as at the moment?

There are political implications which filter down the line and have an effect on the industry as a whole.

As stated earlier, there are not many contractors in the Gisborne area. The available resource is small, due in part to considerable export of logs in the 60's. The downstream processors are also small, and log royalties are low. On average I'm looking at about 10 logging sites per year to supply my mill with up to 1000 tonnes (logs) per year.

Travelling Distance

Limited scale logging may demand considerable travelling to and from the job. At some point the contractor must decide that the travel time or distance is too great and he must camp out in shearers' quarters, or failing such accommodation flag the job away altogether.

The travel cut-off point will be partially determined by the quality of the contractors work vehicle, condition of the roads on which he must travel, attractiveness of the job and the willingness of you and your men to travel or to camp out.

I tend to travel up to an hour each way beyond which we'll camp out but it all depends on other factors which we may have to contend with at the time - weather, site and temporary accommodation conditions, and on personal circumstances at the time that the job is underway.

Dare I say it but this is 1985 and a vastly different social and technical age now to the days gone by. There are more pressures on people, and more expectations regarding lifestyle. There are not many people left in this country prepared to leave the urban concrete jungle to camp out on the job.

Site location and distance from the home base has an effect on logging costs and the extra costs involved have to be reimbursed somewhere along the line for our poor contractor (who has seen a rich one?).

Planning of Logging

Every block is different and will have various constraints which require handling in various ways. To do the job profitably planning is required before logging commences. This takes time which costs money but the time and cost is well spent if the job can run smoothly and be profitable.

I have an old bushman mate who I take out to look at most jobs with me. He gets used as a mentor as we toss ideas back and forth and produce an acceptable and workable plan of attack.

A number of these minimum scale logging operations have other major factors associated with them - they are close to buildings, yards, fences, overhead lines, water supplies etc so planning can become very complicated and quite crucial to the success of the operation.

Cash Flows

Are you logging for the grower or the log buyer? Payment from both can vary depending on their financial structure and on what they understand to be the job conditions. I say that because "it is them that's paying". People tend to have different interpretations of what is meant from what is said - what I think you meant is not what you meant.

A simple written agreement signed by both parties with the job conditions and method of payment fully detailed can prevent much unpleasantness at a later date.

It is important to have a reliable cash flow and to build up a good credit rating with your own business suppliers. For one reason or another small contractors in the forest industry have had a poor record with money and have been a bankers nightmare.

Dealing with the Forest Owner

This can be very pleasant with a good working relationship between the contractor and the owner. This guy will remove a fence, shift stock to another paddock, come over for a look and a yarn but basically stays away allowing you to do your job while he goes about his normal farm work. He'll let you know anything that you should know and you'll do the same to him. As a result there is a mutual respect which benefits both - he wants to see us come in do the job and move on so he can get back to normal. He wants to see a job well done and will give what assistance he can to achieve this. Contractors will generally do a better job as a result of this - and we'll be welcome back.

At the other end of the scale is the owner who thinks his trees are worth a fortune (based on the retail price of timber), niggles all the time about the job you're doing and is generally totally counter productive.

He is the guy who sees his annual farm inputs and outputs arriving at or leaving the farm at the rate of approx. 2.5

tonnes/ha/year. Then the logging contractor comes in to harvest that woodlot which yields 500 tonnes/ha and these weights and volumes are beyond his comprehension. Yes, he is used to 40 tonne rigs for stock on his metalled tracks but the logging rig is on open paddocks and often poor tracks. When it gets damp the contractor just can't help making a mess. The owner by his attitude has a poor relationship with the logging crew. He knows it all but he knows nothing.

With this kind of job you want to finish as soon as possible so you take a few short cuts and do less than a 100% job. But this can be fatal - he'll tell his mates and you've suddenly got a bad reputation. The secret to success in this case is to give him a chainsaw with the throttle wide open, tell him to hop on and send him for a bumpy down-hill ride. If the hint isn't taken by that course of action tap him on the shoulder with a falling tree.

In general most owners are reasonable if you take time to explain and reason with them about what is involved with a logging operation.

Labour

The recruitment, training and retention of good employees can be a major problem in limited scale logging operations, especially in non-traditional forest areas.

This subject has been discussed at previous Seminars. In fact I gave a paper on it at the 1983 Seminar and I think the points raised and discussed are still valid. What has the L.F.I.T.B. done in the last couple of years? Could Forestry Council be asked to look at this problem? The logging industry is a high risk industry - look at the A.C.C. levy that is demanded from us. There are not many industry classes with a higher levy. Can we tolerate this situation for much longer?

Perhaps the logging industry should look closely at what the wool industry has done with shearing and wool handling courses. Do we need a Godfrey Bowen and a team of trainers? It just might be worth looking at.

Limited scale logging has been here for a long time already and is going to be big business in years to come. At this stage something like 10% of the nations exotic forest resource is under small grower ownership. That represents 100,000 ha which at 500 tonnes/ha represents 50 million tonnes. Put another way based on a 25 year rotation small growers are adding 2 million tonnes of wood/year as annual increment and most of this will be harvested on a limited scale basis. That does not include the production from State forests such as Mangatu Forest which is a protection/production forest and so comes under the parameters of limited scale logging. It is not hard to imagine that 50% of all future production will be limited to some extent.

I recently heard of a guy who has tendered for a logging contract at Mangatu who is talking about a half million dollar investment for new equipment. I haven't mentioned wet weather downtime and

this is a constraint on these East Coast erosion prone soils. With a major capital investment it can't afford to be idle but I feel that site conditions will dictate and there will be considerable downtime. The weather as I prepare this paper has certainly held us up and as I said at the beginning I'm fairly diversified.

Research and Extension

The staff of LIRA must be congratulated on the work they do and the enthusiasm with which they do it. Logging contractors will gain more from some LIRA publications than from others as they can relate the paper to their own particular operation. I know the staff are involved with considerable work away from Rotorua which must continue.

But what about having more field days in non traditional forestry areas where new techniques and ideas can be discussed with contractors and local problems can be defined and possibly solved? I'm sure our Labour Department Bush Inspectors would assist in the organisation of such events.



"....what about having more field days in non-traditional forestry areas....."

(LIRA Photo Cn244/18)

Last but not least, we have the good old kiwi farmer who reckons he'll do his own minimum scale logging. He may have the ability and a bit of gear to do the job but safety and good techniques are out the window and there's no planning. A few trees may get felled today and a truck is due tomorrow to cart the logs away but meantime the bull has found himself a way to the heifers, the lambs need drenching and the shearers are a couple of days ahead of schedule. Because he is a farmer the stock must come first and the trees get left to become sap stained and deteriorate and then the buyer won't accept them.

Just to finish off, my old bushman mate came around for a yarn. His comments were very pertinent and he summed the whole job up so they are worth repeating.

"You guys in limited scale logging are all the same. Over capitalised with machinery, interest bills too high, jobs too small and not enough continuity of work so you can't make ends meet."

But he was the first to admit that if you want to do this type of work you need good gear. Bush work is like farming - it's a way of life.

So it is obvious that the problems of limited scale logging are of a scale equal in magnitude to the Tarndale slip.