



Sugar Research  
Australia

# IMPLEMENTING HARVESTING BEST PRACTICE

Applying best practice is not simple. For example, there are no sliding rules or databases that determine HBP payment rates. Longer crew hours due to lower pour rates aren't easy to negotiate for compliance with workplace health and safety guidelines. A tonnage-based payment system for harvest contractors and employees in some cases may not facilitate a best practice harvest operation. The fluctuations of crop yields and prices make analyses of best practice harvesting scenarios difficult.

An ideal harvest will strike a profitable balance between harvest price and harvest job quality. The first step to achieving HBP is to plan the harvest. The harvest plan should be developed jointly by the growers and the harvest contractors, and it is important that all parties be clear and upfront on the plan.



## *The following should be addressed:*

- Clear definition of the harvesting job the growers expect from the contractors.
- Harvest price quote from the contractors based on the harvesting description outlined by the growers.
- Assess the cost of harvest.
- Negotiations between the growers and contractors to find the optimum balance between the harvesting job, price and grower returns.

## *Points to consider are:*

- field conditions
- farm harvest efficiency
- daily harvester allocation
- season length
- harvest days.

## *The above points are all related to:*

- crop yield
- farm layout
- haul distance
- mill crushing capacity
- group tonnage
- area tonnage
- rostered days off.

## *The main questions for the group to consider when adopting a harvest plan include:*

- Is the quality of the planned job satisfactory?
- Does the planned harvest comply with workplace health and safety guidelines?
- Does the planned harvest allow the crew an opportunity to carry out HBP?
- Is the harvest price reasonable for the quality of the job?

The key to implementing the plan on the farm is to ensure that it has the support of the harvest crew. Generally, harvest plans that have realistic expectations of job quality and crew work conditions will be received well by the harvest crew.

Record keeping completes the planning and harvest management circle by providing feedback on the harvest and measuring the effectiveness of the harvest plan.

## PLANNING THE HARVEST

### *Planning the harvest will ensure that:*

- The harvesting contractors know what job quality the growers expect
- This standard is obtainable
- This standard is affordable.

### *To develop a harvesting plan, the group needs:*

- A clear definition of the harvesting job the growers expect of the contractors
- An estimate of the impact of field conditions on harvester productivity
- A harvesting price quote based on the harvest job description.

### *Points to consider when developing a harvest plan:*

- daily harvester allocation
- season length
- harvest days
- field conditions
- workplace health and safety compliance
- mill scheduling compliance.

### *These points are also related:*

- mill crushing capacity
- group tonnage
- crew rostered days off.

### *Develop a number of harvest plans by:*

- Using harvest logbook data
- Using the experience of harvester owners/operators, growers, and mill staff
- Using local productivity data and the experience of productivity services.

### *Rate the plans against the following criteria:*

- Harvest job quality provided
- Workplace health and safety compliance
- Cost
- Mill scheduling compliance.

Select the harvest plan that provides the highest possible job quality with fair and safe working conditions for the crew at a price that is acceptable.

Record harvest performance with logbooks/data logging systems to measure the actual performance compared to the planned performance. This method will allow more accurate planning in the future.

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