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# Sharing the load

By JOSH FLINT

**M**ENTION the benefits of equipment sharing and, invariably, one of the first questions among non-believers is: "Yeah, but who gets to run the planter first?"

For brothers David and Brian Muegge, who have shared equipment for 13 years, prioritizing fieldwork is fairly easy. "It's not an issue with us because the ground varies enough," David explains. "We have a traffic pattern for equipment movement that works very well."

With last year's planting season, David says, they would finish one field just as the next one dried out. The brothers farm about 2,000 acres in western Illinois, near Mendon. Typically, they start with the westernmost ground, well-drained bluff soils. From there, they move east to tighter clay soils.

"We try to catch ground in the Mississippi river bottom whenever it's ready," Brian adds.

### Divided cost

Drainage variation helps eliminate the priority problem, but their father, Ray, showed them the benefits of equipment sharing early on. Ray allowed each of his sons to buy into his equipment ownership.

By reducing machinery costs, David and Brian were able to purchase land early in their careers. David made his first land purchase in 1988, two years before he graduated from Illinois State University. Brian graduated from ISU in 1997. The next year, he purchased his first 50 acres.

Brian and David are currently sharing a full line of equipment. Fuel, repair and maintenance bills are split down the middle.



**FAMILY PLAN:** Sharing equipment has allowed brothers David (left) and Brian Muegge to run newer, more dependable machinery. David says it allows them to farm their 2,000 acres better.

### Key Points

- Ray Muegge got his boys into sharing equipment early on.
- Prioritizing fieldwork is fairly easy for David and Brian.
- Sharing assets will help them expand for future farmers.

Not only do David and Brian share machinery, but they also share the workload. Brian, who is seven years younger, is more

up to date on the latest technology. Therefore, Brian compiles yield and input data each year. On the other hand, David's strong suit is fabrication. A couple of years ago, he built a self-propelled sprayer using an old tractor. "We're both able to do what we enjoy doing," David says. "At the same time, things get done better than if one of us was doing it all."

Sharing the workload also frees them up for other commit-

ments. David contract-finishes hogs. Recently, he was busy taking hogs to market. In the meantime, Brian cleaned equipment after harvest.

Since they each have two boys, David says it's easier to leave work early for a little league game. "It's nice not having to be dependent on an employee," Brian adds.

Speaking of family, Ray Muegge retired last year. His retirement spurred some long

discussions on succession planning. If and when the Muegges' children decide to return to the family farm, David says their willingness to share will make it that much easier to build a viable operation for everyone.

"I don't think there's a better way of bringing a kid up than on a farm," notes Brian.

■ Read about another successful farm partnership on Page 7.

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