

Crop Production

Agrivision



MILLER



CROPP



HODORFF

I plan to stack the bales in the shed with a fork attachment he made for our loaded tractor. How much harder to handle will these bales be versus little bales stored upstairs in our 70-stanchion barn? I'm getting too old to unload wagons, but I don't want to spend money on a new baler and then regret buying it. Is switching from little squares to big squares a good idea for a farmer who milks 80 cows?

Hodorff: In my opinion, buying a new baler is a bad idea. First, it's too much investment for an 80-cow herd. Second, there are enough big-square balers around to hire this work done.

Switching to big square bales is probably a good idea. Look around and find a custom baler.

Miller: This is a classic question of investment in technology vs. labor. The answer may depend on how you feed your cows. If you have a mixer, can it handle big squares? If you don't have a mixer, how would you feed big squares? Ask a University of Wisconsin-Extension agent for advice and referrals to other producers feeding big squares.

Cropp: You will enjoy larger square bales if you have the proper equipment to handle them. Herd size is not a major

factor. You must be geared up to remove bales from the field before it rains as they do not resist water at all. Also, be prepared to apply preservative if necessary. Do you have adequate space for storing these bales in a handy location? I don't think you will regret this decision. However, when your neighbors see your new baler, be ready to respond to requests for custom work!

Exiting dairying

With \$4 corn, we've decided to have an auction and sell our 70 cows. We plan to crop farm and raise our dairy heifers. We'll probably sell them as they freshen, but we would keep them and go back into dairying if crop farming doesn't work out. We farm 400 acres. Some neighbors have asked us to plant their corn this spring, chop their corn silage in the fall, and chop their haylage this summer. Combined, the neighbors farm 400 acres — about half hay and half corn. We have a fairly decent line of machinery, but my husband and I aren't sure how much field work we can handle since we've always milked cows. Do you think this is too much for two people?

Hodorff: If you decide to sell out because of \$4 corn, you probably will not return to milking in the future. If corn drops back to \$3, would the crop farming still cash flow? Make sure you have thought this through. Answer these questions: Have you looked at cash flow and debt issues? Will this effort support your family living? Can you work with and for your neighbors? With 800 acres, you should be able to handle the workload, but is that enough acres to cash flow reinvesting in equipment?

Miller: Your answer depends on the quality of the equipment and your ability to put in long hours for short periods of time. Instead of daily attention to livestock, the alternative you propose will require periods of intensive labor interspersed with periods with more free time. Cash flow will be very different with this proposed plan. Managing payment from your neighbors will also be different than getting a milk check.

Cropp: It depends. What does a "decent" line of machinery include? Is your equipment new enough? Is it large enough? Two people can probably handle this amount of work, but be prepared for some long days. Another option would be to hire some part-time help, if needed, for the "crunch" times, especially during hay harvest. The other question you should ask is whether it will be profitable. Complete a cash-flow budget of all your costs including fuel, repairs, insurance, depreciation, interest, labor, etc. Compare these costs with projected income using standard custom rates. This homework will be valuable in your decision.

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