

Maine Logger Faces New Market Demands

21 June 2016 by Continental Biomass Industries (CBI)

Gary Taylor of Porter, Maine says that given his druthers, he would cut nothing but white pine sawlogs. That's understandable, considering that Taylor lives and works in an area—southern Maine and eastern New Hampshire, famous for its high-quality and prolific white pine resource. Unfortunately, cutting exactly what you want is something most loggers only dream about. That's because markets are spotty and production on modern logging operations is high, so it takes many different high-volume markets to consume what the average operation produces in a week.

For Taylor's typical two-job operation, that's between 60 and 80 loads of various wood products in a typical week. Biomass fuel goes to Sappi in Westbrook, Maine, Pine Tree Power in Tamworth, New Hampshire and Eversource in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. Hardwood and softwood sawlogs are sold to six different mills in New England, while roundwood pulp goes to Sappi, Verso and Catalyst paper companies.

Taylor says that biomass production is one of those areas where you buy the equipment necessary to produce the product not because you're enthusiastic about the market or the price being paid, but simply as a necessary feature of the entire operation that needs to be dealt with. His latest equipment, in fact, was a CBI (Terex) 484 drum chipper, set up on the landing near Ossipee, NH when Taylor's job was visited by The Northern Logger. A Morbark 30-inch chipper was working on the second job.

The company, L.E. Taylor and Sons, has a wide variety of equipment, including four trucks and three chip vans to handle the biomass side. Sometimes it's a good market but other times, like now, markets are closing, quotas are tightening and the price is nothing to write home about. That doesn't mean you don't need the best, most efficient and productive equipment you can find. In fact, bad markets are perhaps the best reason to use good equipment, especially if it can keep production costs down and/or produce a specialty chip for a special market. Currently, the Taylor operation produces roughly 50 percent chips and 50 percent roundwood pulp and sawlogs. Put another way, the combined operation produces between 1,000 and 1,200 tons of whole tree fuel chips per week.

According to Aaron Benway, New England sales manager for CBI/Terex, "It has been a very rewarding and long lasting relationship that when Gary and his brothers wanted to focus more on logging and less on land clearing the discussions started on taking the CBI 6800T grinder in trade for a CBI drum chipper," Benway says. "During the design process of the new machine and while building the first unit on shop floor," Benway adds, "Gary and several of his brothers visited the factory and offered valuable input on what we were

building. When completed the machine was displayed and run live at the 2015 Northeastern Forest Products Equipment Expo in Bangor Maine.”

The same depressing marketing scenario as biomass goes for pulpwood, as well, even though pulp’s downward trajectory seems more predictable: There will never be more paper produced in Maine than there is today, and there will most likely be even less produced tomorrow. But unlike the biomass market, producing roundwood pulp doesn’t require any specialized equipment not also being used to produce sawlogs and veneer logs. The operation runs three log trailers fitted with center-mount Serco loaders for log and pulpwood shipments. Two yard loaders—a Cat 559 and a TimberKing 560 are equipped with CSI pull-through delimbers and slashers—a Propac and a CTR.

Production equipment in the woods starts with three tracked feller bunchers, two Valmet 430s and a TimberPro 735. Four Cat 525C grapple skidders haul the wood to the landing, where it is slashed and sorted into logs, pulpwood or biomass.

The operation also has a variety of excavators and a Cat D5 dozer for road and landing work, as well as various duties on land clearing jobs. Taylor says that 90 percent of the harvesting his company does is selective thinning, while the remaining ten percent is land clearing. Taylor works mostly on private land, buying 30 to 40 percent through consultant foresters, while negotiating the balance with private landowners.

The company was started in 1982 by Taylor’s parents, Laurence and Brenda. Their four sons, including Gary, own and run the company today, but third generation family members are a big part of the workforce, including three of Gary’s nephews. In all, there are ten full-time employees, two part-timers and one subcontractor, Milt Seavey of Seavey Trucking, also of Porter, ME.

As on any professional crew, safety is a critical consideration. Taylor & Sons Timber Harvesting has been with the same workers compensation insurance company—Acadia—for the past 20 years. The company is a member of the Professional Logging Contractors of Maine (PLC), and the employees have all completed Certified Logging Professional (CLP) training.

Taylor says the company used to do a lot more land clearing, complete with grinders and other associated equipment. While they still do some land clearing jobs, Taylor prefers logging—although he said making money in the land clearing business isn’t hard if you have the right equipment and jobs.

As to the future of the logging business and specifically, his company, Gary Taylor isn’t terribly worried, considering that three of his nephews are fulltime employees of the company and likely to take over at some point.

Taylor says one of the most important considerations for him is to be able to work with family members and to do so within a reasonable radius of their home base of Porter. So far that's worked out pretty well, as there is a good supply of timber within 50 miles of home, and Taylor does what he can to work with local landowners.