Willow Harvesting Equipment Considerations

What Is Willow?

Shrub willow (Salix spp), a fast growing short rotation woody crop, produces biomass feedstock for conversion to heat, power, liquid transportation fuels, and other bioproducts. Willow production has attracted attention in the Northeast and Midwest as well as Canada and across Europe due to its rapid growth, high yields, and ability to thrive on lower quality open agricultural land. The crop is harvested every three to four years and requires minimal maintenance between harvests. The Northeast Woody/Warm-season Biomass Consortium (NEWBio) http://www.newbio.psu.edu/-whose objective is to build robust, scalable, and sustainable value chains for biomass energy based on energy crops—is actively facilitating willow production. To date there are over 1300 acres of willow being grown in NY and PA. About 200 acres are harvested annually in NY and PA with yields of 20 to 35 green tons per acre. In the next few years 350 to 450 acres will be harvested as newly planted stands become mature.

Equipment Information

At present, willow is harvested using a New Holland short rotation coppice (cutting) header (130FB) which is attached to their FR9000 series of forage harvesters (such as the New Holland FR9080, FR9090 or FR850). The header is specifically designed to cut and chip willow, poplar, and eucalyptus.

The harvester is intended to harvest double rows of willow with stems up to 4 inches in diameter, and produces 0.4 to 1.75 inch-sized chips. It is also possible to harvest larger diameter single stem woody crops like poplar. Chipped material can be directly transported to a variety of end users for conversion without requiring further processing. At optimal conditions the harvester can produce 75 to 95 green (wet) tons/hour of willow biomass crops with standing biomass ranging from 20 to 35 green tons/acre.

Since specialty equipment is used to plant and harvest willow, a major barrier to large-scale willow crop production is a lack of available equipment. In addition, harvesting is the single largest cost component of willow biomass production. Detailed enterprise budgets on willow production are available at the NEWBio website at http://www.newbio.psu.edu/. To facilitate willow production, NEWBio is making available to prospective willow growers this specialty equipment for harvesting willow. There is also specialty equipment available for planting willow. This offer is only available until the end of the NEWBio project in late 2017.
**Harvest Assistance**

The NEWBio project has contributed to the purchase of the specialized 130FB cutting header. Under the agreement with NEWBio, the owner of the cutting header (based in New York) will arrange for transportation of both the forage harvester and header to harvest sites. The grower is expected to pay transportation and operating costs. At present, due to depreciation and maintenance of the willow harvester, the owner charges $500 per machine hour plus operator and fuel costs.

There is no charge for the NEWBio-subsidized header use. Having a forage harvester at the location where the willow is being harvested could potentially reduce costs, but the following considerations and adjustments are recommended and/or required to run the harvester through willow in the northeastern US.

**FR Base Unit Requirements**

Depending on FR model and original configuration, some or all of these features may be installed already. Consult a NH FR dealer to determine which features are on your unit.

1. Cutterhead knife configuration that will supply chips in the desired size range
2. Dual Hydraulic Drive Kit
   - Normally used for independent header and feedroll drive
   - Standard on larger FRs since 2010
3. Grain Header Hydraulic Drive Kit
4. HydroLOC Connector Shaft Kit
   - Used to mechanically connect feedroll gearbox and 130FB header drive gearbox
5. Discbine Hydraulic Drive Kit/Dual Drive Diverter
   - Diverts header drive flow to drive saw blades on 130FB
6. High Capacity Auxiliary Hydraulic Kit

**Recommendations for better performance:**

1. Four-wheel drive (4WD)
2. Rear auxiliary hydraulics and drawbar – required if pulling a wagon with the harvester.
3. Narrow tires
   - Preferably forestry tires, and no wider than 710mm on the front
   - Most forage harvester tires probably will not survive jagged stools
4. Fuel tank shield/guard
   - Not sold by CNH but recommendations and designs are available

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**Summary**

NEWBio has made both specialized planting and harvesting equipment available to growers. However, growers should be aware of all of the costs associated with harvesting, especially costs to adapt local forage harvesters to fit the willow cutting header. It is also important for growers to be cognizant of other management costs associated with planting, maintenance, and marketing prior to embarking in willow production.

For more information, visit Penn State’s NEWBio website at:

http://www.newbio.psu.edu/

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