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Timber Ridge Logging

From hand felling to the forefront of cut-to-length logging, Timber Ridge is blazing a trail of production, profitability and stewardship.

By Scott Russell

It's a little hard to be considered pioneers in this day and age, but brothers Brock & Jason Stadler of Franklinville, New York sure seem to qualify. In hilly western New York State, hand felling and skidding the high value hardwood timber is the traditional way to carve out a living in the forest industry.

Timber Ridge Logging came from humble beginnings back in 2000 as the brothers began hand felling and skidding with horses and tractors to support a small firewood business which today has progressed into one of the region's leading cut-to-length operations. Timber Ridge operates a 2015 Komatsu 911.5 harvester (with 365.1 head) and a 2015 Komatsu 865 forwarder. They also still own most of their previous equipment including a Komatsu 860 forwarder which is used about one third of the time to keep pace with the added production of the new harvester.

The pioneering part of their story began with the brothers' vision for mechanization. Early on, wheeled harvesters and forwarders weren't offered anywhere in their area. The brothers learned about the many advantages of the cut-to-length method at logging shows and searching the internet. After a few years in business, they were able to purchase a "vintage" 1995 Valmet 546H harvester from the used-equipment market from the lake states.

Initially, while learning their machine, they knew it wasn't being utilized to its best advantage by cutting and delimiting trees followed by an old Timberjack skidder. The harvester worked well enough in the mixed



Owner/operator, Brock Stadler says the 365.1 head on the 2015 Komatsu 911.5 harvester is fast and accurate. He appreciates its simplicity, durability and power.



Brock is impressed with his 911.5s comfort, power and production.

hard and softwood for several years, but in all honesty it was not rugged enough for the job. They remained committed to the CTL concept, but came to the realization the old harvester was holding them back.

In 2007, Timber Ridge purchased a used 2001 Valmet 911 harvester fitted with a slide boom and a 960 head. At the time, they paired it with an old Franklin model 170 forwarder. Other equipment upgrades steered them toward Valmet and Komatsu machines which also steadily increased their production. The timing worked in their favor. As hardwood markets tanked, the company shifted to softwood and pulp. That move kept them busy at a time when much of the industry suffered.

Barriers to Entry

Brock says, “Our markets and traditions in this area have shaped what we cut and how our area loggers fill the demand. We only have one pulp mill in our area and the highway system corridors make it impractical to move lower value wood longer distances. That also makes it nearly impossible for the hand felling/skidding loggers to wrap their minds around the cost of this equipment.

He continues, “Mechanization is a big investment, but not without risk. We created our niche, which has worked pretty well for us, but I’m not sure there is enough room for many more mechanized outfits like us.”

About Cut-to-length

Cut-to-length logging in its purest form is a very nimble two-man, two-machine system. It allows an owner/operator team like Timber Ridge Logging to get high production while controlling their costs. They can efficiently perform selective harvests or tackle final felling jobs with minimal environmental impact. A harvester and forwarder are easy to transport and require virtually no landing. The two-machine system also operates much lighter on the land than a conventional felling & skidding logging operation.

Cut-to-length machines are highly maneuverable and travel through the forest on delimbed branches laid down by the harvester operator as the trees are harvested. A forwarder operator follows, picking up logs and placing them in the forwarder bunk which are then carried to a landing to be sorted as they are unloaded.

Sorted piles of different log species and diameters are merchandised to different mills allowing the logger to market the



Timber Ridge Logging owners Jason (left) and Brock Stadler (right) with Bill Regan (center) of Anderson Equipment Company.

trees to attain the highest value. Efficient sorting is an advantage the CTL system offers when compared to a conventional full-tree operations.

Cut-to-length machines also minimize damage to the residual stand. The machines can operate 52 weeks a year in virtually any terrain including steep ground or wet conditions (including spring thaw). CTL delivers high production, yet minimizes costs because two machines function more efficiently than a larger logging crew with the added employee and equipment costs.

With cut-to-length logging, there are no big landings to create prior to the start of a job or brush piles to clean up after the job is finished. Foresters and landowners love the results of a cut-to-length job because the forest can recover faster.

Timber Ridge Logging serves their customers year ‘round. They operate within a 75 miles radius of Franklinville. Their annual cut breaks down to about 30 percent hardwood to 70 percent softwood with pulp with diameters averaging from 8 to 20 inches. Looking at the big picture, their jobs split about 50/50 selective to clear cuts. The brothers report weekly production averages of 25 to 30 truckloads, but agree they can achieve far more production when conditions are favorable.

To secure consistent and timely delivery, the brothers own their own trucking company consisting of two trucks and two drivers. Jason does most of the mechanical work and the books are handled by their

mother, whom they are trying to convince to leave her current job. They’d like her to keep track of their businesses and one other venture they are considering which is also related to the forest industry.

Jason says, “Speed is the name of the game when you’re handling low-grade timber. Loggers in our area can go broke chasing the pulp market. You’ve got to move a lot if you’re going to make money. It’s a little weird, you pay a lot for hardwood & saw timber versus pulpwood, and so for us margins usually run a little higher on the pulp and low-grade hardwoods.

Brock adds, “The mills like the product we produce and I think it’s beneficial to have reliable partners. They understand the investment we have here and the work we do to help in their success. At the end of the day we all have markets to fill.”

Bill Regan, Regional Sales Representative for Anderson Equipment Company, works out of the Olean, New York branch and counseled the Stadlers through their latest equipment purchase. Bill says, “We’re on the other side of supporting Timber Ridge. They purchased Valmet and Komatsu even before we were the Komatsu dealer in this area. Now, we’ve grown to serve them with parts and support tailored for their business.”

Brock adds, “And one of the biggest benefits of finally being able to purchase a new machine from our local dealer compared to the secondary market is that Anderson Equipment was able to arrange

for professional field training. I've never had a trainer before. Within just a few hours, I learned so much about the machine and new operating techniques that have helped me save time and avoid troubles. It was amazing!

"Our new machines are three times more productive than our previous machines. Looking back, this harvester is easily ten times more productive than our original Valmet 546. You always wonder how these machines can possibly deliver more production, but they do. Our new machines are faster, more durable and more reliable. Komatsu has certainly been paying attention to the loggers' needs."

Both Jason and Brock feel Komatsu offers the best possible solution for their needs. They report the 911.5 harvester with the maxi system is excellent and easy to use (even for non-computer guys). They also say that in both the harvester and forwarder the cab and air-ride seats are very comfortable, the surround visibility is exceptional and the fuel economy is outstanding.

Brock says, "We're fueling up to three machines a day on less than 100 gallons. I get two days on a harvester using only 60 gallons and the 865 is only a bit more, but it carries a 16.5 ton load. That is wonderful! When we had our conventional felling/skidding crew we couldn't bring enough fuel to the woods. I'm glad those days are behind us."

The brothers often think about adding to their crew, but feel New York State's worker compensation costs are just too ridiculous. Plus, as owner/operators they

believe they can keep better track of their overall costs and be more competitive on timber sales.

Perhaps the biggest attraction for Timber Ridge to this harvesting method was safety. Years ago, even as experienced hand cutters, they both reported having injuries on the job. Cut-to-length equipment allows them to work in comfort and stay off the ground, which they feel is when injuries happen. In their area, they report that you don't have to travel far to hear a tale of an injured logger. It's not a matter of if a logger gets hurt, but when, especially with hand felling crews because there are too many variables at play out in the woods.


Brock says, "I like to work from the comfort of the cab. I will triple cut a really big tree to stay inside. Jason and I rarely have to step outside during our shifts and daily service is much faster and easier on our new equipment. We literally run the business from the seats of our machines. They are so quiet. I can take phone calls and can talk to a customer or landowner in a professional manner and never slow down. It is really nice."

Both Jason and Brock love their new state-of-the-art machines, but understand that with regard to technology, they are still a few years behind the cutting edge trends in Scandinavia. As Valmet lovers, they were pleased Komatsu purchased the great forestry brand. They feel Komatsu, as a global company adds manufacturing and engineering expertise which translates to greater equipment reliability and a consistent network of support.

Brock says, "It's also great to learn what new technologies we can expect on future machines. Things like the larger 931 harvester which might be practical for us. Or things like GPS/GIS for harvesters and forwarders. GIS links satellite data with machine movements to keep track of harvesting boundaries. That way you can plan out the most efficient harvesting paths, keep track of tree counts and mark log piles so the forwarder doesn't leave anything behind under a blanket of snow. It is an incredible time to be in the forest industry."

Jason adds, "I'm interested in the Komatsu Comfort Ride system, the four-point hydraulically operated cab leveling system for forwarders. That wasn't available in North America when we purchased our model 865, but hopefully it is the game-changer we've been reading about. I can't wait to give it a try."

Brock concludes, "They're even working on a 'Harwarder' which is a harvester and forwarder combo machine for thinning work. I don't know how practical that would be here in the US, but it's nice to know they are thinking out of the box."

For Timber Ridge Logging, big dreams and committing to a new way of logging seems to have made all of the difference. At one time they could only imagine the possibilities of high production, operational efficiency and the inherent safety offered by the cut-to-length method. Now that they are established and are past making all those difficult decisions they can take pride in their Komatsu Equipment and  their pioneering career path.



The Komatsu 865 8-wheel forwarder carries 16.5 tons. The advanced HST transmission optimizes traction and maneuverability.



XT430-3

100%
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Forestry Solutions

**Machines,
Technology
and Support
you need
to get the
job done!**



895

XT430-3 Feller Buncher

- Totally new fully-certified forestry cab
 - Commanding “widescreen” working view
 - New ergonomic dash control layout
- Advanced IQAN-MD4 digital control system
 - Easy-to-use intuitive Komatsu programming
- 11 LED work lights provide 2-3 times more illumination
- Rugged heavy duty “Forestry” undercarriage
 - Proven independent closed-loop track drives
- 13’-6” transport height (with 22” trailer deck height)

895 Forwarder

- Robust 20 metric ton high capacity bunk with LoadFlex headboard
- Powerful HST transmission and portal bogie design optimize traction, speed and comfort
- 259HP Tier 4 interim engine provides higher HP, higher torque and lower fuel consumption
- More powerful cranes and HD grapples with ProTec hose protection
- Larger cab dramatically improves operator comfort & visibility
- 12 LED work lights deliver excellent illumination

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