

Equipment maintenance is time well spent

Pay the money and spend the time to take care of equipment now. You'll be rewarded with machinery that lasts longer.

By *Susan Harlow*

Jack Daniels, service manager for Salem Farm Supply, Salem, N.Y., has some advice on preventive maintenance that can save you time and money in the long run.

PRO-DAIRY: Where can producers find information on preventive maintenance programs for tractors and equipment?

Daniels: The operator manual is the bible for each machine – machinery manufacturers tell you plainly how to service equipment and when. On 90% of farms, these get thrown in the corner and never get read. At Salem Farm Supply, as with other dealerships, we try to deliver all used equipment with operator manuals.

P-D: What's the operator's role in maintenance?

Daniels: The operator is the key. He should develop good habits, checking the oil and greasing the equipment daily before he goes out in the field. If everybody drives a tractor, it may get little care and maintenance. So the key is, especially with specialized equipment, to designate one operator to take care of it.

P-D: What records should be kept?

Daniels: For each vehicle in my truck fleet, I keep a binder with a sheet with dates, mileage and all reference numbers like serial numbers. I record all maintenance and repairs. Records can be as simple as a pocket notebook for each vehicle or piece of equipment. Or use a computer spreadsheet. You should have a regular schedule of things



Jack Daniels, service manager at Salem Farm Supply, Salem, N.Y., keeps detailed maintenance records on all the trucks in his fleet. He recommends you do the same thing for equipment on your dairy.

like changing the transmission fluid or antifreeze. You can change them for all vehicles at the same time, no matter the mileage, to make sure it gets done. It can be annually or biannually, such as antifreeze this winter, transmission oil next winter, antifreeze again the following winter.

For farm machinery, note in your records the hours, repairs, oil changes and things that should be done yearly, such as maintaining the air conditioner

P-D: What effect does a preventive maintenance program have on the life and cost of equipment?

Daniels: A machine that's well maintained and properly operated can last a long time. Most of the tractors that come through our service department are 20 to 30 years old. Maintenance isn't cheap – it can cost \$200 for a transmission oil change. It's like the

FYI

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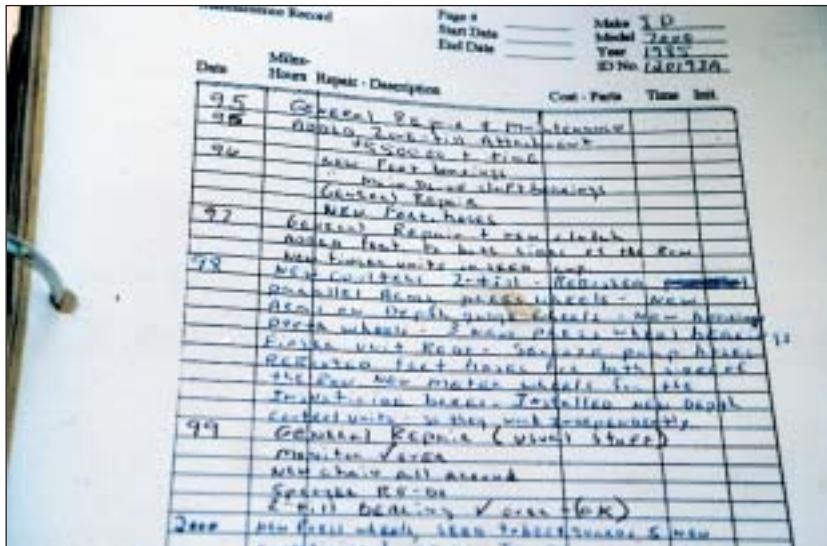
old saying, pay me now or pay me later.

In the Northeast, maintenance is particularly important. A tractor sits outside, and it's been 10 degrees for the past three days. Then the temperature shoots up to 40 degrees with a fog. Water condenses on all exposed metal components inside the power train, causes rust and contaminates the oil. Even if a tractor sits in the barn for two years, it still needs an oil change regularly to remove the condensation.

To remind yourself, put a piece of masking tape with the mileage for the next oil change on the dash or scratch it into the paint on the engine oil filter.

P-D: How does preventive maintenance affect resale value?

Daniels: If you have a preventive maintenance



Repair and maintenance records can be as simple as a pocket notebook for each piece of equipment. Or use a computer spreadsheet.

program and store equipment inside, you can double the resale value, especially if the machine looks good – if it's a 'honest machine.' That means it hasn't been painted over and has straight sheet metal, no rust and no welds. ■

Equipment longevity depends on details

Jack Daniels, service manager for Salem Farm Supply, Salem, N.Y., offers additional tips on how to keep equipment running for years and years:

- Clean a piece of equipment when you're done with it. Get off the mud, seed and chaff, which can rot the piece of equipment.
- If possible, store equipment inside. The sun deteriorates it as much as water does.
- If equipment breaks in the fall, fix it before you put it away. Many dealers have access to a credit plan that offers low-interest payment plans and deferred payment options through the winter. Take advantage of specials in late winter, the off-season, when it's slow and service people want the work.
- Pay attention to your skidsteer – it's the most neglected piece of machinery on the dairy. Clean the silage from around the engine and radiator, as the heat buildup can

cause engine damage and sometimes fires.

- Maintain air conditioning systems. The air filter is key to good air in the cab. It should be changed or cleaned to avoid getting mold in the evaporator. Mold buildup can make people sick. Operators should turn off the AC five minutes before shutting down the machine, but leave the fan on. This dries out the evaporator and helps to prevent mold and unwanted odors.
- Use good quality coolant and lubrication. If they don't have additives, you're not doing yourself any favors.
- Train yourself to take regular oil samples, especially from the engine housing. They can red flag a problem before it becomes major. You can buy an oil sample kit for about \$25 at most dealerships. Packaging and testing are prepaid.
- Check tire inflations and make sure wheel bolts are tight.