

Budget Reductions Only Half Of Story

Leasing new M Series Motor Graders decreases net costs, while productivity soars

Last year was a productive one for the Crawford County, Ark., Highway Department. The crew built 12 miles of new paved road, and placed asphalt overlay on another five miles. They also maintained 700 miles of unpaved roads and 500 miles of existing paved roadway.

That's a far cry from five years ago when Crawford County Judge John Hall came into office.

"Our road system was in shambles. Our motor graders were worn out and old," said Hall. "Our machines were broke down more than they worked."

New Machines Reduce Budget

Leasing nine Cat® M Series Motor Graders has helped to improve the county's fleet and roadway system. "Leasing frees funding to build roads. We couldn't have made the improvements otherwise," said Hall.

The Crawford County Highway Department fleet consists of nine Cat 12M Motor Graders and a 140M2 AWD Motor Grader. All but one of the 12Ms are leased. Leasing costs approximately \$200,000 annually.

When Hall was elected, the county budgeted \$340,000 annually just for parts and repairs and employed three full-time mechanics to maintain and repair a fleet of motor graders that ranged in age from 5 to 20 years.

"I knew that I had to modernize the equipment or I'd be out of a job after one term," said Hall, who is in charge of purchasing as county judge.

Leasing the M Series Motor Graders has cut the parts and repairs budget to approximately \$100,000. With the decrease in repairs, the county was able to handle the work with only one full-time mechanic.

Productivity Up 400%

In addition, new Cat motor graders have increased production by 400 percent compared to what had been possible using the old equipment.

"With the new machines, we have constant production," said Hall. "Our uptime has increased dramatically."

Improved uptime enables crews to better maintain existing roads. "Our roads are better than they've ever been," said David Burkhart, road foreman. "We're continuously maintaining roads. That makes a big difference."

The switch from steering wheels and levers in older machines to the joystick-operation of the M Series Motor Graders has made operation easier and improved production.

"It's a whole lot easier on operators. They do a better job, and there's greater productivity," Hall said. "Operators love the joysticks and don't want to go back to conventional motor graders."

Chris Keith, road superintendent, said, "The joysticks have increased productivity. Everything is so accessible. The operators aren't pulling on levers all day long, and aren't as worn out at the end of the day."

"It's just easier to work," said Burkhart. "With the old machines, you had six levers and a steering wheel. Now, operators are doing the same work using two joysticks."

Tough Stuff

Motor graders maintain unpaved roads and complete base course work for the construction of paved roads. The 140M2 AWD is also used for road construction. "When rolling eight inches of base course, our crews need a big machine," said Keith.



JOHN HALL,
County Judge
Crawford County, Ark.



The 140M2 AWD's all-wheel drive is an advantage when operators are pulling ditches. "The machine also provides our operators with great stability while working in ditches," Keith said.

Front-wheel drive is a great benefit when working on slopes. "They set the speed, and that holds them up on the slopes," Burkhart said.

The machine also has the power to cut hard, packed gravel. "The 140M2 AWD cuts gravel that has set up. If you've ever cut gravel that's set up, it's like cutting concrete," Burkhart said.

Leased machines are covered by warranty for the life of the three-year agreements. Dealer, Riggs Cat, provides warranty repairs. County employees take care of oil changes and other preventive maintenance.

"The warranty has improved uptime, and has been great for us financially," Hall said.

County crews now have the necessary machines to improve the road system. "We do it all," said Hall. "We have all the equipment necessary to build and maintain roads." ☞

The Facts:

- The Crawford County Highway Department has 42 regular employees, including office personnel, and 10 part-time employees.
- Cat® machines in the highway department include, nine 12M Motor graders, 140M2 AWD Motor Grader, D5KXL Track-type Tractor, D6D Track-type Tractor, D6C Track-type Tractor, 977L Track Loader, 320CL Hydraulic Excavator, 430E Backhoe Loader, and a PS150 Soil Compactor.
- Each of the motor graders runs approximately 1,300 to 1,400 hours annually.
- Crawford County owns nine tri-axel trucks.
- The county highway department's gravel budget has been increased from \$240,000 annually five years ago to \$1.4 million today to aid in road construction and maintenance.
- Crawford County's population has increased by 17 percent during the past 10 years.

