

North Carolina's Southern Logging Pioneer

Sherwood Padgette is more than just a third-generation logger – he's a Southern logging industry pioneer.

Starting out in 1965, it didn't take Padgette long to learn the tricks of the trade. However, as the forest products industry in the South began to falter in the mid-80s, Padgette began to realize that in order to stay in the game, you have to adapt to your surroundings.

"Since I wasn't making any money, I had to come up with a new way to stay in the green," he explained. While a majority of loggers were working through wood dealers to sell their product, Padgette took a chance and began to seek out his own logging contracts.

For the next twenty-five years, maintaining control of his contracts proved profitable for Padgette Logging.

In 2004, Padgette decided to take his operation to the next level.

"I got to thinking," said Padgette, "If I go into a tract of timber and only take out the pulpwood, it keeps us about 3 weeks on the job." He understood that the longer he stayed on a tract, the lower his transportation costs, and the lower his overhead. "I figured if I could get a chipper to process those tops and limbs and smaller wood that we typically left behind, we could stay on that track of timber for at least 5 weeks."

By reducing the number of times he moved jobs per year and increasing his yield, he could increase his revenue.

And so Padgette Logging began to chip. Of course, the going rate for chips in 2004 wasn't great, "But it was additional revenue," says Padgette. "We already had the cost of cutting and skidding the material, so why not utilize the rest? If you're not chipping the tops and limbs at the same time you are removing logs and pulpwood, you're going to lose everyday."

When the bioenergy markets finally began heating up in 2008, Padgette started getting the value out of his chips that he once hoped for. He has contracts with Coastal Carolina Clean Power in Kennansville, NC and also with Craven County Wood Energy near New Bern, NC. They also ship some of their material to International Paper Co., and have been approached by mills in Canada to purchase some of their chips for fuel.

Padgette is running the Bandit Model 2590 whole tree chipper to produce a ¾" chip, and is thrilled with it's production. "That is one swell machine," says Padgette of his Bandit. While he used to own three competitive chippers, one demonstration from Bandit and he was converted.

"Bandit has so many more added features and is a much better engineered machine." He notes that while it depends on the material, he can run approximately 10-15 loads before having to change the knives, although he's gone as many as 24 loads.

As for production, they are achieving anywhere from 35 – 50 loads in a 40 hour week. For Padgette, it's not the size of the operation, but the ability to make the most out of every project. Staying small, and finding a way to achieve maximum production on minimal land is key.

"If you're going to stay in the green, you're going to have to find a way to stand on your own two feet," he explains. By seeking out individual contracts within the local industry, he is able to maintain control over the size and scope of the project. "Typically, we work a track that is 35 – 150 acres in size," says Padgette. He adds, "But if I can get 50 loads on 10 acres, I'll do it."



North Carolina logging pioneer.../2

“I’ve had the large jobs in years past, but here’s how I see it: Say you take the small jobs, and make enough money to buy the big job – but when you get the big job, you can’t sustain yourself,” says Padgette. “You’ll run yourself right out of business when times get hard.”

Padgette encourages his fellow loggers to invest in quality, and above all, try before you buy. “Since I bought my Bandit 2590, four or five more boys in my area have bought Bandits – just after watching mine work,” says Padgette.

Padgette is passionate about his equipment, and a firm believer in quality over quantity. “I know people need to buy as reasonably as they can, because it’s a tough business out here. In fact, I told a guy just the other day, ‘If you’re thinking of starting out in the chipping business, the first thing you do is buy good equipment – buy a Bandit chipper.’ The welding is far superior to any others I’ve seen, they are a more technical unit, they have four stabilizers instead of just one – the Bandit is just a well-built machine.”

And while there is room for growth in this market, Padgette is content to stay right where he is. He keeps his crew busy, which consists of his brother, nephew, son-in-law, and another gentleman who has been with him for 30 years. “You can fine-tune your job as much as you like,” says Padgette. “But if you don’t have the right employees, it’s a disaster.”

“My guys are good and know what they have to do to please me, and what it takes to get paid.”

And while the current economic future is uncertain, Padgette offers a simple explanation of the system. “If I can’t keep the green line above the red line, we’ll be out of business. With the help of the good Lord, we’re going to stick with this awhile longer.”



Padgette Logging, based in North Carolina USA, invested in Bandit’s Model 2590 whole tree chipper to produce a ¾” chip and is thrilled with the results