

Deciding whether to fix or replace equipment

By **BRENNA WIEGAND**
For the Capital Press

Winter repairs are brisk business at Ag West Supply in Harrisburg, Ore., where farmers tend to keep machinery longer. This is largely due to the large number of smaller acreages in the area.

"Around here they basically run them until they absolutely die," service manager Larry Austin said. "About 17 out of every 20 combines we see in a year are 20-plus years old."

Every repair estimate begs the question: Fix or replace?

"In 2014 I put in \$7,000 worth of repairs on a combine," Austin said. "In 2016 it was \$5,000 on the same one. The customer could get a new one for \$300,000 or perhaps buy a used one for half that, but \$5,000-\$6,000 a year versus \$150,000?"

Older models bring greater risk of untimely problems and are not typically under warranty.



Courtesy Ag West Supply
A decades-old combine meets an Ag West service truck near Harrisburg, Ore. Many area farmers choose to fix rather than replace older farm machines.

"If you break a chain on your combine and it goes through your auger system, you're up the creek because you've just destroyed everything inside," Austin said. "That's a \$15,000 to \$20,000 repair, but they'll fix it because they can't afford a new one."

"One customer had a \$4,000

repair but opted to buy a new one because he'd had so many problems with it and was just done with it," Austin said. "He traded in and was happy going down the road. We fixed it, sold it, and the guy who bought it was happy, too."

Sometimes choice is taken out of the equation.

"The cost of a new baler's about \$35,000," Austin said. "Last year a customer brought his old baler in and spent \$15,000 because he loved it. He went out and baled for a week, put 2,000 bales through that machine. It was the best thing he ever had."

"He was going down the road with it and turned in front of a logging truck," Austin said. "To repair the baler was about \$17,000 and when the bill is 75 percent of a replacement the insurance company totaled it out. On his own dime he paid the \$15,000 to repair it but when there's an accident and they total it out what are you doing to do?"

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