

Select The Right Knives For The Job

NEW HOLLAND (Lancaster Co.)—Don't get caught unprepared this spring when the haying season hits high gear. By checking and replacing key parts on your mower-conditioner, such as knife sections, you can improve efficiency and reduce downtime.

"When most mower-conditioners come out of mothballs, they often aren't given enough attention to do a proper job," said Mike Cooper, product and pricing analyst, Ford New Holland Parts and Service Operations. "Knife sections are one of the most important, and often overlooked, maintenance considerations."

With all the tough wear and tear on knife sections, they're the most frequently replaced part on mower conditioners, he adds. When selecting replacements, it's important to note that the cutting edge, material, thickness, and quality all affect knife section performance.

*** Cutting edge.** Three basic cutting edge options are available for use on mower-conditioners: over-serrated, under-serrated and smooth. The most widely used cutting edge today is the over-serrated. Because it sharpens itself, this

cutting edge performs well in most crop conditions and is properly suited to abrasive soils. Under-serrated and smooth knives work best in tough, stringy grass, said Cooper.

*** Material.** High-quality knife sections are made from induction-hardened spring steel and feature double-hardened cutting edges and back edges. For increased durability and resistance to rust during the off-season, some farmers prefer chrome plated knife sections. These high-performance knives have a mechanical chrome coating that offers increased strength and longer wear life. Chrome knife sections are often preferred by custom-operators, Cooper said.

*** Thickness.** Thickness of knife sections affects mower-conditioner performance in two ways. Since the knife sections, guards and and knife clips are dimensioned to within .005 to .020 of an inch, even a minor difference in knife thickness can disrupt the cutting mechanism. For mower-conditioners that require thinner knife sections, he recommends replacement parts that are induction-hardened on the back edge as well as the cutting

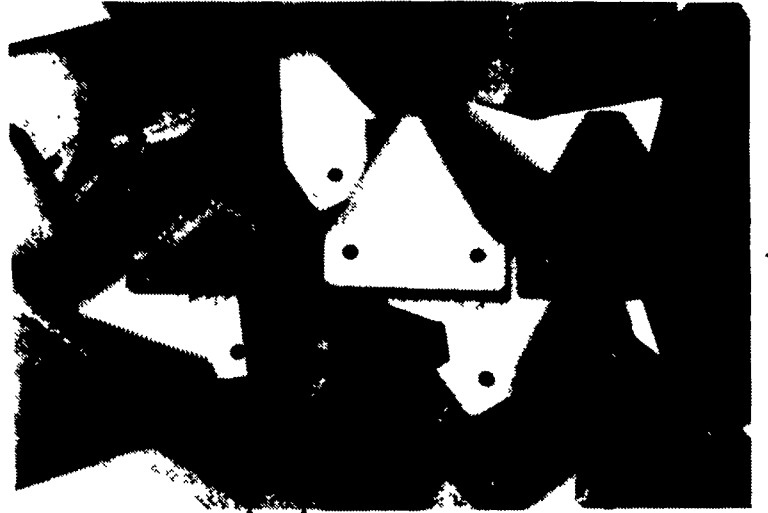
edge for increased wear life. Thicker knife sections wear longer and are less likely to break.

However, using knife sections that exceed recommendations will increase the load on the knife drives. Mixing knife sections of different thicknesses is not recommended, he adds.

*** Quality.** Cooper advises farmers to evaluate replacement knife sections for such quality factors as thickness and hardness. "Usually, you get what you pay for in selecting replacement knife sections. Buying cheaper, lower quality parts doesn't always save you money, especially when you consider increased downtime. Your local Ford New Holland equipment dealer can help you get the right part for your machine as well as the best value for your money."

Selecting the best type of knife for the job also depends on soil and crop conditions. Factors such as crop density, stringiness and moisture all can affect cutting performance and the service life of the knife sections.

"Most complaints about mower-conditioner performance can be



Knife sections are one of the most important and often overlooked maintenance considerations on mower conditioners. With all the wear and tear these machines encounter, they are the most frequently replaced part.

traced back to improper maintenance of the cutting mechanism," said Cooper. By replacing worn or bent knife sections, farmers may avoid the hassles of reduced operation speed, increased cutting load

and increased horsepower requirements. "Most importantly, proper pre-season maintenance saves valuable haymaking time," he said.

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