



Wearing Many Hats

Franklin Logging adds Peterson biomass chipper to the lineup

By Kathy Coatney

Franklin Logging is no newcomer to logging. The company was founded in Etna, Calif., by Ralph Franklin in 1951, and in 1964, he partnered with his son, R.G. (Gary). That same year, Gary married Dianne Mittelbach, who worked side-by-side with her husband running the office, while he handled the field operation.

Gary's dream was to own a sawmill and thirty-eight years later, in 2002, he and Dianne purchased Shasta Green Inc., in Burney, Calif. The following year, when Gary died from injuries sustained in an automobile accident, Dianne chose to keep Shasta Green Inc. and Franklin Logging Inc. running with encouragement and support from her top notch staff.

Tom Franklin (no relation) has been with the company for more than thirty-eight years. Starting out as a truck mechanic, he is currently the general manager of Shasta Green Inc., Franklin Logging Inc., and Franklin Logging Transportation Inc.

Being a small company, finding and keeping talented people is crucial, and it has kept them viable, Dianne says.

"We always run as a family. They (employees) were always able to talk to my husband. They were able to talk to me. This is what we do. It's one to one," she says.

Staying Versatile

Franklin Logging has stayed versatile, Tom says. "We try to sell in niche markets where larger corporations maybe can't make the changes as fast as we can to what customers want." Being a small company has allowed them, he says, to custom cut to their customers' specifications.

"It's a tough time for the sawmill and lumber industry," Tom adds, but the ability to be flexible in this economy is vital.

The Sawmill

The company has scaled back production in the last few years due to the economy. Currently, the mill employs about 60 fulltime employees and produces about 65 million board feet a year.

Primarily Ponderosa pine is run through the sawmill, but the pungent scent of Incense Cedar, White Fir, or Douglas Fir can fill the air, depending on the type of logs being run.

A variety of equipment is used in the sawmill, including:

- 22-inch A5 and 35-inch A5 Nicholson debarkers
- five-foot Can Car band mills



- a 12-inch double armor Sherman gang edger
- a 3-saw USNR board edger
- a 60-bin Morris sorter
- a 20-foot MoCo Stacker
- TMT slabbers

Logging

Presently, the company is running three logging sides and two chipping sides with approximately 40 employees working the chipping and logging sides.

A key factor in their success is retaining trained employees, Tom said, which also maintains the family atmosphere the company is known for.

The goal is to work eleven and a half months of the year. "It's pretty much year round," Tom said, but weather can shut them down.

On the logging side, they run Caterpillar skidders — 525 and 527 track skidders. They also use Kobelco LK200 log loaders, a Link-belt 210 track log loader, and a Link-belt 240, which has the 7000 Logmax processor attachment. The falling is contracted out, so they don't have equipment with that, Tom said.

Biomass

The Peterson 4300 Drum Chipper is the newest acquisition for the biomass operation at Franklin. "It was the prototype, first one that Peterson manufactured," Tom says.

The decision to use a drum or disc chipper comes down to what the chips are used for. In the past, when manufacturing paper chips, Franklin ran six disc chippers, but the focus now has switched to hog fuel for the biomass plants. Currently, they are primarily using the chipper to clean up top piles behind their logging operation.

Michael Spreadbury, marketing manager for Peterson Pacific Corporation, said choosing between a disc or drum chipper comes down to what kind of material is being chipped.

The 4300 makes chips from 0.25 inches to 1.25 inches. Long sticks and slivers cause problems with the end product. The 4300 has optional 4x4 and 3x3 grate openings. The grates re-circulate the longer pieces until they are small enough to go through the grate. This method stops most of the long sticks or spears from getting into the chip pile.

The 4300 also has tool steel babbitted 0.8 knives, and they can process anywhere from 250 to 500 tons of material before being replaced. How long the knives last depends on a couple of factors — the moisture content of the wood, and how clean it is. The knives can be easily changed in about 30 minutes using standard air tools.



Tom says the 4300 produces a consistent product for them. And quality counts when it comes to biomass product.

The prototype Franklin Logging uses went into the field in the fall of 2009. The 4300 series was released the following winter of 2010. There are currently 15-16 models in operation.

Peterson also makes a 4310 model, which is a track version of the 4300 machine. The 4310 has a little more ground clearance — about 28 inches of clearance compared to 20 inches on the 4300. It is shorter for maneuverability and has eight key knives in the drum. Later machines were upgraded, and they have six knives. With the six knife system, the knives are actually larger and heavier, which makes them last longer.

“Mechanically, it’s the same machine,” Spreadbury says.

Franklin has the option of changing their drum to the upgraded system if they choose to. “It seems to be working fine,” Tom says, so for the present time, he has opted not to change the drum.

Tom is a clear fan of Peterson, and the 4300 is Franklin Logging’s tenth Peterson machine. “We have a lot of faith in their equipment,” he said, adding the 4300 is one tough machine.

60 years old

2011 will be the 60th anniversary for Franklin Logging — something very few logging companies can boast. One of the things that has kept them in the game for six decades is the ability to wear many hats.