

Custom Rates Survey, 2013

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This publication provides information on current custom farm work rates by crop reporting districts in Tennessee (Figure 1). Custom rates charged and/or paid by Tennessee farmers in 2013 are presented in this publication by operation, unit of charge, and area of the state.



Figure 1. Crop Reporting Districts

The names of at least 10 people or businesses per county who did custom farm work or hired custom farm work during the previous 12 months were solicited from each Tennessee county Extension leader in March 2013. Lists were returned from 45 counties with a total of 509 names. These names were used as a sample list for a mail survey. This survey is not based on a random sample of custom operators in Tennessee. Each operator on the compiled list was mailed a survey, cover letter, and return envelope in June 2013.

After four weeks, a second survey was sent to those not replying to the first survey. The number of surveys mailed and replies received by grouped crop reporting districts are shown in Table 1. For all areas combined, the response rate was 20 percent.

Table 1. Summary of Mail Survey of Tennessee Custom Rates Survey, 2013

Crop Reporting District	Number of Counties	Surveys Mailed ¹	Surveys Returned (Wrong Address or No Custom Work)	Surveys Completed	Percent Response
1 & 2	18	139	8	25	19
3 & 4	33	184	7	36	20
5 & 6	44	186	8	37	21
Total	95 ²	509	23	98	20

¹One follow-up mailing was made about four weeks after the first mailing
²List of names for mail survey were available from only 45 counties.

Information was requested on rates paid or received for custom work. Respondents were asked to provide rates only for the custom work which they did for others or hired others to do for them.

The number of responses and the custom rate averages for the state and crop reporting districts for each operation are shown in Table 2. Some of the variation in rates, especially hourly rates, is due to kind and size of equipment used. Because of the wide variety of machines used, it was not possible to classify the information by machine size.

Cost of materials was not included in the rates, except where specified. The rates reported in this publication do not necessarily indicate the fairness of any given rate but simply indicate the rates being charged or paid by those reporting. A “fair” rate could be either higher or lower than those shown. Actual custom rates may vary according to availability of machinery in a given area, timeliness, operator skill, field size and shape, crop conditions, and performance characteristics of the machine being used.

There is a wide variation in rates charged for operations, even within the same geographical area. One reason for the large variance in rates could be that some custom work is done for friends, relatives, and neighbors at reduced rates. Some custom work is done by farmers who do their own work first and may not include the full cost of machinery ownership in their rate. Also, it is easy to under-estimate the full cost of ownership and operating costs of machinery.

The custom rates shown in Table 2 should only be used as a guide. Rates change from year to year due to cost changes and the availability of custom operators. The average price of diesel fuel at the time of this survey was \$3.75 to \$4.00 per gallon.

A farm operator must consider several things (cash flow, ownership and operating costs, labor, reliability of custom operators) when making the decision to own or lease machinery versus hiring custom work. A spreadsheet to help evaluate the cost of owning and operating farm machinery is available online at <http://economics.ag.utk.edu/soft.html>

Table 2. Custom Rates by Operation

Operation		Tennessee			District 1 & 2			District 3 & 4			District 5 & 6		
		No.	Average	Range	No.	Average	Range	No.	Average	Range	No.	Average	Range
Land Tillage Operations (Include charges for machine, power, and labor)													
Moldboard Plowing	\$/acre	4	\$12.50	\$10.00-\$15.00				2	\$12.50	\$10.00-\$15.00	2	\$12.50	\$10.00-\$15.00
Chisel Plowing	\$/acre	5	\$13.00	\$8.00-\$17.00				2	\$11.50	\$8.00-\$15.00	2	\$16.00	\$15.00-\$17.00
Disk - Chisel	\$/acre	3	\$9.33	\$8.00-\$10.00	2	\$10.00							
Disk - Tandem	\$/acre	9	\$13.28	\$10.00-\$17.50	2	\$13.75	\$10.00-\$17.50	6	\$12.50	\$10.00-\$15.00			
Cultimulching	\$/acre	2	\$11.00	\$10.00-\$12.00									
Field Cultivating	\$/acre	5	\$9.60	\$8.00-\$12.00				3	\$10.00	\$8.00-\$12.00			
Subsoiling	\$/acre	3	\$11.67	\$10.00-\$15.00				2	\$12.50	\$10.00-\$15.00			
Chopping Corn Stalks	\$/acre	2	\$10.00										
Application of Fertilizers and Chemicals (Equipment and labor, do not include material costs)													
Applying Bulk Dry Fertilizer	\$/acre	49	\$6.86	\$5.00-\$15.00	17	\$6.37	\$5.00-\$7.00	18	\$6.96	\$5.75-\$10.00	14	\$7.32	\$5.00-\$15.00
Applying Bulk Dry Fertilizer	\$/ton	3	\$41.67	\$40.00-\$45.00							3	\$41.67	\$40.00-\$45.00
Applying Liquid Fertilizer	\$/acre	15	\$8.90	\$6.00-\$17.00	7	\$8.21	\$6.50-\$17.00	5	\$6.90	\$6.00-\$7.50	3	\$13.83	\$8.50-\$17.00
Applying Anhydrous	\$/acre	2	\$12.50	\$10.00-\$15.00									
Lime Application	\$/acre	9	\$11.56	\$5.00-\$20.00	3	\$7.67	\$6.00-\$10.00	3	\$13.00	\$5.00-\$20.00	3	\$14.00	\$10.00-\$20.00
Lime Application	\$/ton	19	\$9.11	\$2.50-\$20.00	8	\$7.50	\$4.00-\$10.50	7	\$9.50	\$8.00-\$20.00	4	\$11.63	\$6.00-\$15.50
<i>Chemical Application:</i>													
Tractor and Sprayer	\$/acre	3	\$10.67	\$7.00-\$15.00				3	\$10.67	\$7.00-\$15.00			
Self-Propelled Sprayer	\$/acre	39	\$7.88	\$5.00-\$19.50	15	\$6.83	\$5.00-\$10.50	14	\$7.14	\$6.00-\$8.00	9	\$10.97	\$7.00-\$19.50
Aerial Sprayer	\$/acre	8	\$9.03	\$7.00-\$12.50	5	\$9.00	\$7.00-\$10.00	2	\$7.38	\$7.25-\$7.50			
<i>Precision Application:</i>													
Fertilizer	\$/acre	19	\$9.25	\$6.00-\$30.00	10	\$8.38	\$7.00-\$9.50	8	\$10.75	\$7.00-\$30.00			
Chemicals	\$/acre	6	\$7.71	\$5.00-\$9.00	2	\$8.88	\$8.75-\$9.00	2	\$7.25	\$7.00-\$7.50	2	\$7.00	\$5.50-\$8.50
Grid or Zone Sampling	\$/acre	15	\$7.27	\$5.00-\$9.00	11	\$7.43	\$5.00-\$10.00	4	\$6.81	\$6.00-\$7.50			
Planting Operations (Do not include seed cost)													
Conventional Till-Crop	\$/acre	6	\$16.17	\$10.00-\$25.00	3	\$13.33	\$10.00-\$18.00	3	\$19.00	\$17.00-\$25.00			
No-Till-Crop	\$/acre	29	\$16.33	\$10.00-\$30.00	10	\$14.95	\$10.00-\$18.00	13	\$15.81	\$15.00-\$30.00	6	\$19.75	\$15.00-\$30.00
Conv Drill Small Grain	\$/acre	3	\$10.67	\$10.00-\$12.00				2	\$10.00				
NT Drill Small Grain	\$/acre	5	\$14.40	\$7.00-\$25.00				5	\$14.40	\$7.00-\$15.00			
<i>Grass/Legume/Pasture:</i>													
Grain Drill	\$/acre	8	\$12.00	\$7.00-\$22.00				6	\$12.67	\$7.00-\$22.00			

Table 2. Custom Rates by Operation (continued)

Operation		Tennessee			District 1 & 2			District 3 & 4			District 5 & 6		
		No.	Average	Range	No.	Average	Range	No.	Average	Range	No.	Average	Range
Harvesting: Flat Rate													
Combining	\$/bu	4	\$0.68	\$0.45-\$0.85	4	\$0.68	\$0.45-\$0.85						
Combining	\$/acre	22	\$34.55	\$25.00-\$42.50	4	\$34.29	\$25.00-\$42.50	9	\$33.67	\$25.00-\$40.00	8	\$35.63	\$35.00-\$40.00
Picking Cotton Lint	\$/lb	2	\$0.10		2	\$0.10							
Pick Ear Corn	\$/acre	3	\$35.00	\$25.00-\$50.00							2	\$40.00	\$30.00-\$50.00
Storage, Drying, and Handling													
Grain Storage Charge	\$/bu/mo	10	\$0.14	\$0.03-\$0.50				5	\$0.16	\$0.05-\$0.50	4	\$0.06	\$0.03-\$0.10
Hay or Straw Harvesting Operations													
Mowing Hay	\$/acre	12	\$14.96	\$7.00-\$40.00	3	\$12.33	\$7.00-\$20.00	4	\$13.00	\$10.00-\$15.00	5	\$18.10	\$9.00-\$40.00
Mowing Hay	\$/bale	3	\$5.67	\$3.00-\$8.00				3	\$5.67	\$3.00-\$8.00			
Mowing and Conditioning Hay	\$/acre	7	\$20.43	\$8.00-\$45.00	2	\$9.00	\$8.00-\$10.00	3	\$16.67	\$15.00-\$20.00	2	\$37.50	\$30.00-\$45.00
Mowing and Conditioning Hay	\$/bale	2	\$6.50	\$4.00-\$9.00				2	\$6.50	\$4.00-\$9.00			
Teddering Hay	\$/acre	10	\$9.50	\$4.00-\$25.00				3	\$8.33	\$5.00-\$10.00	6	\$11.00	\$5.00-\$25.00
Teddering Hay	\$/bale	3	\$2.33	\$2.00-\$3.00				3	\$2.33	\$2.00-\$3.00			
Raking Hay	\$/acre	8	\$7.63	\$4.00-\$15.00	2	\$4.50	\$4.00-\$5.00	3	\$8.67	\$5.00-\$12.00	3	\$8.67	\$5.00-\$15.00
Raking Hay	\$/bale	3	\$2.67	\$2.00-\$3.00				3	\$2.67	\$2.00-\$3.00			
Small Square (55-75 lbs)													
Baled and Dropped on Ground	\$/bale	14	\$2.24	\$0.03-\$12.00				6	\$1.93	\$0.03-\$8.00	7	\$1.11	\$0.05-\$2.00
Baled and Loaded on Wagon	\$/bale	7	\$1.34	\$0.04-\$2.50				4	\$0.91	\$0.04-\$1.50	3	\$1.92	\$0.05-\$2.00
Added Charge to Haul and Store	\$/bale	5	\$1.32	\$0.15-\$3.00				4	\$0.90	\$0.15-\$1.75			
Baled, Loaded, Hauled, and Store	\$/bale	6	\$3.15	\$0.90-\$6.00				5	\$3.18	\$0.90-\$6.00			
Large Bale													
4 x 5													
Baled and Left in Field	\$/bale	10	\$10.75	\$6.00-\$15.00	2	\$13.50	\$12.00-\$15.00	2	\$11.00	\$10.00-\$12.00	6	\$9.75	\$6.00-\$15.00
Baled and Net Wrapped	\$/bale	2	\$12.00	\$10.00-\$14.00									
Baled and Hauled from Field	\$/bale	2	\$10.00	\$5.00-\$15.00							2	\$10.00	\$5.00-\$15.00
Move Bale	\$/bale	2	\$5.00										
Bale & Wrap Wet Bale in Plastic (plastic included)	\$/bale	4	\$17.38	\$6.00-\$33.00							2	\$11.50	\$6.00-\$20.00
Mow, Tedder, Rake, & Bale	\$/acre	4	\$16.75	\$11.00-\$24.00							3	\$18.67	\$12.00-\$24.00

Table 2. Custom Rates by Operation (continued)

Operation	Tennessee			District 1 & 2			District 3 & 4			District 5 & 6			
	No.	Average	Range	No.	Average	Range	No.	Average	Range	No.	Average	Range	
5 x 5													
Baled and Left in Field	\$/bale	7	\$12.57	\$8.00-\$25.00				2	\$11.50	\$9.00-\$14.00	4	\$10.00	\$8.00-\$12.00
Baled and Net Wrapped	\$/bale	2	\$14.50	\$11.00-\$18.00									
Baled and Hauled from Field	\$/bale	4	\$20.75	\$14.00-\$30.00							2	\$17.00	\$14.00-\$20.00
Move Bale	\$/bale	2	\$3.00	\$1.00-\$5.00									
Bale & Wrap Wet Bale in Plastic (plastic included)	\$/bale	2	\$18.00	\$16.00-\$20.00							2	\$18.00	\$16.00-\$20.00
Mow, Tedder, Rake, & Bale	\$/acre	3	\$23.67	\$11.00-\$40.00				2	\$15.50	\$11.00-\$20.00			
Mow, Tedder, Rake, & Bale	\$/bale	7	\$23.86	\$20.00-\$30.00				4	\$23.50	\$22.00-\$24.00	2	\$21.50	\$20.00-\$23.00
6 x 5													
Baled and Left in Field	\$/bale	8	\$15.75	\$10.00-\$40.00	2	\$13.00	\$10.00-\$16.00	5	\$17.60	\$10.00-\$40.00			
Baled and Net Wrapped	\$/bale	3	\$26.33	\$12.00-\$50.00				2	\$33.50	\$17.00-\$50.00			
Baled and Hauled from Field	\$/bale	3	\$32.33	\$15.00-\$60.00				2	\$41.00	\$22.00-\$60.00			
Move Bale	\$/bale	2	\$3.00	\$1.00-\$5.00									
Mow, Tedder, Rake, & Bale	\$/bale	4	\$23.75	\$18.00-\$30.00				2	\$23.50	\$22.00-\$25.00			
Tractor and Machine Rental													
Less than 100 Belt Horsepower	\$/hour	3	\$36.67	\$20.00-\$55.00					\$36.67	\$20.00-\$55.00			
Tractor Rental (100-150 HP)	\$/hour	5	\$70.00	\$20.00-\$125.00					\$56.25	\$20.00-\$100.00			
Tractor Rental (over 150 HP)	\$/hour	4	\$70.00	\$35.00-\$120.00	2	\$52.50	\$35.00-\$70.00		\$87.50	\$55.00-\$120.00			
Grain Drill	\$/acre	6	\$9.00	\$7.00-\$10.00				2	\$10.00		3	\$8.00	\$7.00-\$10.00
No-Till Drill	\$/acre	19	\$9.29	\$6.50-\$20.00	3	\$9.67	\$9.00-\$10.00	6	\$9.33	\$7.00-\$12.00	10	\$9.15	\$6.50-\$20.00
No-Till Drill	\$/day	6	\$200.00						\$200.00			\$200.00	
Dry Bulk Fertilizer Applicator	\$/ton	8	\$10.00	\$5.00-\$15.00				2	\$13.50	\$12.00-\$15.00	7	\$8.60	\$5.00-\$12.00
Dry Bulk Fertilizer Applicator	\$/acre	5	\$6.95	\$1.75-\$10.00				2	\$10.00		3	\$4.92	\$1.75-\$7.00
Liquid Fertilizer Applicator	\$/acre	2	\$9.25	\$3.50-\$15.00									
Lime Applicator	\$/acre	5	\$8.20	\$5.00-\$12.00				3	\$7.67	\$5.00-\$10.00	2	\$9.00	\$6.00-\$12.00
Lime Applicator	\$/day	4	\$66.25	\$50.00-\$100.00							3	\$66.67	\$50.00-\$100.00
Manure Handling													
Loading Solid Manure	\$/hour	2	\$16.50	\$8.00-\$25.00				2	\$16.50	\$8.00-\$25.00			
Cleaning Barn	\$/hour	3	\$14.33	\$8.00-\$25.00				2	\$9.00	\$8.00-\$10.00			

Table 2. Custom Rates by Operation (continued)

Operation	Tennessee			District 1 & 2			District 3 & 4			District 5 & 6			
	No.	Average	Range	No.	Average	Range	No.	Average	Range	No.	Average	Range	
Miscellaneous Custom Rates													
<i>Bush Hog/Rotary Mow</i>													
General	\$/acre	8	\$21.00	\$10.00-\$35.00	3	\$15.00	\$10.00-\$20.00	3	\$22.67	\$18.00-\$25.00	2	\$27.50	\$20.00-\$35.00
General	\$/hour	11	\$63.18	\$35.00-\$100.00				8	\$60.63	\$45.00-\$90.00	2	\$55.00	\$35.00-\$75.00
Pasture	\$/acre	8	\$22.13	\$12.00-\$35.00	3	\$15.67	\$12.00-\$20.00	3	\$25.00	\$20.00-\$35.00	2	\$27.50	\$20.00-\$35.00
Pasture	\$/hour	4	\$43.75	\$20.00-\$75.00				2	\$40.00	\$20.00-\$45.00	2	\$47.50	\$20.00-\$75.00
CRP	\$/acre	6	\$25.33	\$12.00-\$40.00	4	\$21.75	\$12.00-\$30.00						
CRP	\$/hour	3	\$71.67	\$15.00-\$120.00	2	\$67.50	\$15.00-\$100.00						
Fence Rows and Ditches	\$/hour	2	\$110.00	\$100.00-\$120.00									
Crop Scouting	\$/acre	3	\$5.33	\$2.00-\$8.00	2	\$7.00	\$6.00-\$8.00						
Soil Sampling	\$/acre	3	\$1.50	\$1.00-\$2.00	2	\$1.25	\$1.00-\$1.50						
Soil Sampling	\$/sample	7	\$8.79	\$4.50-\$15.00	2	\$6.25	\$4.50-\$8.00	2	\$9.00	\$8.00-\$10.00	3	\$10.33	\$7.00-\$15.00
Livestock Hauling with Trailer	\$/head	3	\$11.33	\$4.00-\$20.00				2	\$7.00	\$4.00-\$10.00			
Livestock Hauling with Trailer	\$/mile	10	\$2.56	\$1.75-\$3.50				5	\$2.90	\$2.00-\$3.50	4	\$2.34	\$1.85-\$3.00
<i>Building Fence</i>													
Barb Wire (w/o materials)	\$/ln ft	3	\$1.38	\$0.65-\$2.00				2	\$1.75	\$1.50-\$2.00			
Barb Wire (w/o materials)	\$/hour	3	\$13.33	\$10.00-\$20.00	2	\$10.00							
Barb Wire (with materials)	\$/ln ft	4	\$3.16	\$2.40-\$3.75							3	\$3.22	\$2.40-\$3.75
Woven Wire (w/o materials)	\$/ln ft	2	\$3.25	\$1.50-\$5.00				2	\$3.25	\$1.50-\$5.00			
Woven Wire (w/o materials)	\$/hour	2	\$15.00	\$10.00-\$20.00									
Woven Wire (w/ materials)	\$/ln ft	2	\$5.40	\$3.30-\$7.50									
High Tensile (w/ materials)	\$/ln ft	2	\$2.03	\$1.85-\$2.20									
Post Hole Digging	\$/hour	2	\$60.00	\$20.00-\$100.00				2	\$60.00	\$20.00-\$100.00			
Sawing Wood, Chainsaw	\$/hour	3	\$30.00	\$10.00-\$50.00				2	\$30.00	\$10.00-\$50.00			
Welding	\$/hour	4	\$45.00	\$30.00-\$60.00				3	\$50.00	\$40.00-\$60.00			
Grinding Feed	\$/hour	2	\$32.50	\$30.00-\$35.00									
Land Clearing	\$/acre	3	\$706.67	\$120.00-\$1800.00				2	\$160.00	\$120.00-\$200.00			
Land Clearing	\$/hour	7	\$86.43	\$65.00-\$120.00	2	\$92.50	\$65.00-\$120.00	4	\$80.00	\$65.00-\$90.00			
Land Leveling	\$/hour	4	\$90.00	\$65.00-\$115.00				3	\$81.67	\$65.00-\$90.00			
Building Ponds	\$/hour	5	\$90.00	\$65.00-\$120.00	2	\$110.00	\$100.00-\$120.00	3	\$76.67	\$65.00-\$90.00			
Bulldozer (D6 or smaller)	\$/hour	19	\$86.05	\$45.00-\$125.00	3	\$75.00	\$65.00-\$90.00	12	\$86.67	\$45.00-\$125.00	4	\$92.50	\$90.00-\$100.00
Bulldozer (D7 or larger)	\$/hour	10	\$124.50	\$80.00-\$250.00	3	\$110.00	\$80.00-\$130.00	6	\$135.83	\$90.00-\$250.00			