



BUL 1078

Custom Rates for Idaho Agricultural Operations: 2025

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Contents

- 1 Executive Summary
- 2 Survey Method
- 2 Using the Data
- 3 Idaho Geography and Regions
- 3 Survey Results
- 6 Estimating Rates for Equipment
Rentals or Other Operations
- 6 Discussion of Survey Results
- 7 Further Reading

Executive Summary

FOR EVERY ACTIVITY ON A FARM, a decision must be made: Do it myself or hire it out? Although farm managers have tools available to understand their own cost to spray or plow a field, comparing that with the market price of having a custom operator complete the job for you cannot be done if the price is unknown.

To help producers and others answer that question, University of Idaho Extension surveys farmers and custom operators about the prices they pay and/or charge for common farm production services every few years. We completed our most recent survey in March 2025; this bulletin describes the survey design and results.

This version of the custom rates survey experimented with a different format than previous ones, a more open-ended style. The open-ended question format was successful in some regard in that it garnered more results than prior surveys. However, differences in the content of actual responses required interpretations to each response in order to categorize them accurately. Going forward, if this survey format is retained, then report content will vary from survey to survey, depending on the custom operations for which we receive responses.

The 2025 survey is consistent with 2019's in that it shows wide ranges in cost across custom services. Although we expected our survey to show an increase in prices paid, our results indicate, on average, that many custom services are being offered at the same or similar rates compared with 2019. This might be true across our survey respondents, but the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Economic Research Service (ERS) Farm Income and Wealth Statistics report implies a nearly 53% increase in dollars spent nationally on machine hire and custom work from 2019 to 2025. The expenditure increase is most likely driven by a combination of higher use of custom work and

higher prices for custom services. It should be noted that we received no responses for many of the more specialized services (fumigation, aerial applications, drone services, etc.). Hence, it's possible that the services we were unable to gather responses for have seen a significant price change. However, we are encouraged that the cost of some services has not increased dramatically over the past few years, since other USDA-ERS data show that the prices of many farm inputs (e.g., fertilizer) have increased over this period. We also note that like many businesses, there is variation in the quality and additional services that are provided by different custom operators. Thus, we encourage producers who pay a higher price for an operation for which we report costs in this bulletin to expect higher quality and/or better service.

Survey Method

Previous survey attempts used a survey template in which common custom operations of different types were prepopulated and the respondents' role was to provide a price/cost for the operations for which they had knowledge. Although there are some benefits to this structure, such as providing respondents with ideas of operations of different types rather than expecting them to come up with them on their own, there are also challenges in needing respondents to consider many operations that may be irrelevant.

The March 2025 survey experimented with a more "open-ended" survey template structure to determine whether it would allow for improving survey completion rates. Specifically, the survey instrument design contained a main section in which the respondents were provided with ten blank spaces to list operations of different types and the associated price with unit (e.g., \$/acre). The survey instrument was also developed in paper format and that was converted to a Qualtrics survey for electronic dissemination (survey instrument available upon request to the authors). Due to the adjustment in survey method, some differences occur in how custom operations are categorized in this bulletin compared to previous reports.

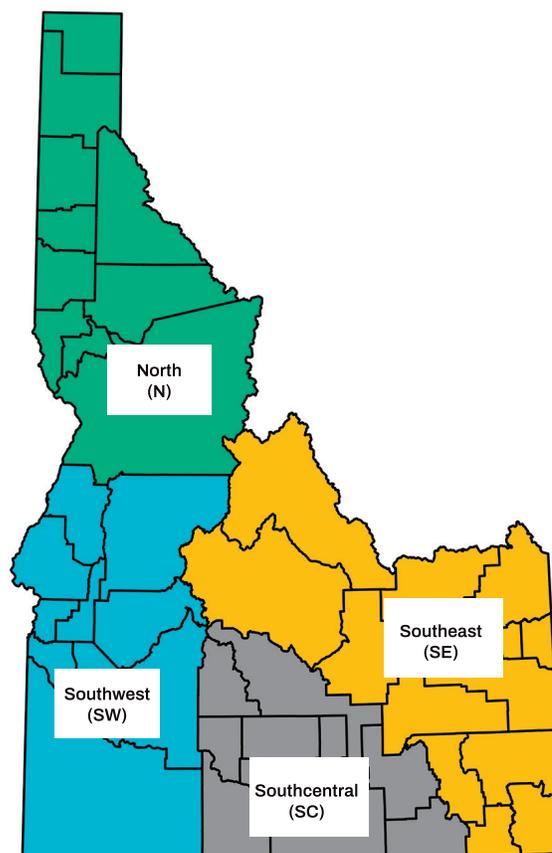
This survey was conducted over the course of four months from December 2024 through March 2025. The paper survey was sent via postal mail to UI Extension educators in the main agricultural-producing counties

for further dissemination to their stakeholders. The Qualtrics survey was promoted online, on social media, in radio, agricultural press publications, and at events attended by the authors. While a few paper surveys were completed, over 90% of the survey responses were received via the Qualtrics survey. The paper surveys that were received were entered into Qualtrics for analysis with the other responses.

A total of 130 responses were received. Of those, 39 gave complete information and provided results for 127 individual custom operations. The responses are representative of all Idaho regions. This bulletin does not distinguish between rates charged by specialized custom operators and those charged by farmers who do custom work as a secondary source of income. Figures that were widely outside the range of other responses were removed from the report.

Using the Data

Rates are typically influenced by factors such as fuel costs, interest rates, soil conditions, topography, field



Source: University of Idaho Extension

Figure 1. Map of Idaho regions.

size and shape, traditional practices in the area, and type of equipment used. Price changes for machinery, fuel, and labor should be considered when using the 2025 data in subsequent years to construct budgets or guide expectations for the costs of hiring for custom operations.

Idaho Geography and Regions

Idaho varies greatly in topography, climate, soils, and other variables affecting agricultural production.

Consequently, a wide variety of crop/livestock enterprises and management systems exist. Because of the variability, production costs can differ from one area to another and even between adjacent farms or ranches. Thus, individual responses were aggregated into statewide and regional averages and ranges are provided where relevant. The reported rates on the regional basis are tied to four geographic regions of Idaho based on similar geography and farming practices and the regions are shown in Figure 1.

Survey Results

Table 1. Tillage operations in \$/acre.

Operation	Range in Rates	Statewide Average	Regional Averages			
			N	SW	SC	SE
Chisel	16.00–16.00	16.00 (1)	16.00 (1)			
Cultivate	9.00–28.00	19.00 (3)	14.50 (2)			28.00 (1)
Disk	12.00–55.00	35.00 (5)	33.50 (2)	35.00 (2)		38.00 (1)
Harrow	7.50–20.00	11.83 (3)	11.83 (3)			
Strip Till	30.00–30.00	30.00 (1)		30.00 (1)		
Subsoil	26.00–26.00	26.00 (1)			26.00 (1)	

Note: Values are averages for those with multiple observations. The number of observations is in parentheses below the value. SC= south-central.

Table 2. Fertilization operations in \$/acre.

Operation	Range in Rates	Statewide Average	Regional Averages			
			N	SW	SC	SE
Dry Fertilizer Application	15.00–15.00	15.00 (1)	15.00 (1)			
Liquid Fertilizer Application	9.50–15.00	12.69 (8)	13.60 (5)		14.00 (1)	9.75 (2)

Note: Values are averages for those with multiple observations. The number of observations is in parentheses below the value.

Table 3. Field preparation operations in \$/acre.

Operation	Range in Rates	Statewide Average	Regional Averages			
			N	SW	SC	SE
Flail Mower	10.00–15.00	12.50 (2)	12.50 (2)			
Field Roller	7.00–7.00	7.00 (1)	7.00 (1)			

Note: Values are averages for those with multiple observations. The number of observations is in parentheses below the value.

Table 4. Spraying operations in \$/acre.

Operation	Range in Rates	Statewide Average	Regional Averages			
			N	SW	SC	SE
Custom Spraying	6.00–15.00	9.85 (10)	9.58 (6)		10.50 (2)	10.00 (2)
Aerial Spraying	9.00–9.00	9.00 (1)	9.00 (1)			

Note: Values are averages for those with multiple observations. The number of observations is in parentheses below the value.

Table 5. Dryland seeding operations in \$/acre.

Operation	Range in Rates	Statewide Average	Regional Averages			
			N	SW	SC	SE
No Till (Fertilizer Unknown)	28.00–75.00	41.60 (5)	41.60 (5)			
No Till, without Fertilizer	18.00–25.00	20.33 (3)	25.00 (1)		18.00 (1)	18.00 (1)
No Till, with Fertilizer	22.00–40.00	29.86 (7)	33.00 (5)		22.00 (1)	22.00 (1)
Specialty Seeding	75.00–75.00	75.00 (1)	75.00 (1)			
Standard without Fertilizer	29.00–30.00	29.50 (2)	29.50 (2)			

Note: Values are averages for those with multiple observations. The number of observations is in parentheses below the value.

Table 6. Irrigated seeding operations in \$/acre.

Operation	Range in Rates	Statewide Average	Regional Averages			
			N	SW	SC	SE
No Till, without Fertilizer	20.00–20.00	20.00 (2)			20.00 (1)	20.00 (1)
No Till, with Fertilizer	24.00–24.00	24.00 (2)			24.00 (2)	24.00 (2)

Note: Values are averages for those with multiple observations. The number of observations is in parentheses below the value.

Table 7. General seeding operations in \$/acre.

Operation	Range in Rates	Statewide Average	Regional Averages			
			N	SW	SC	SE
General Seeding	28.00–35.00	31.50 (2)		35.00 (1)		28.00 (1)
No Till, with Fertilizer	38.00–38.00	38.00 (1)			38.00 (1)	

Note: Values are averages for those with multiple observations. The number of observations is in parentheses below the value.

Table 8. Combine operations in \$/acre.

Operation	Range in Rates	Statewide Average	Regional Averages			
			N	SW	SC	SE
Grain Combine	30.00–85.00	50.36 (11)	40.50 (4)	71.67 (3)	55.00 (1)	40.67 (3)

Note: Values are averages for those with multiple observations. The number of observations is in parentheses below the value.

Table 9. Hay operations in \$/acre.

Operation	Range in Rates	Statewide Average	Regional Averages			
			N	SW	SC	SE
Full Process Big Square Bales	110.00–110.00	110.00 (1)			110.00 (1)	
Cut, Rake, Bale	75.00–75.00	75.00 (1)	75.00 (1)			
Baling Big Square Bales	18.00–18.00	18.00 (1)				18.00 (1)
Raking	8.00–14.00	10.33 (3)		14.00 (1)		8.50 (2)
Swathing	18.00–25.00	20.75 (4)		25.00 (1)	20.00 (1)	19.00 (2)

Note: Values are averages for those with multiple observations. The number of observations is in parentheses below the value.

Table 10. Hay operations in \$/bale.

Operation	Range in Rates	Statewide Average	Regional Averages			
			N	SW	SC	SE
Full Process Big Square Bales	30.00–30.00	30.00 (1)				30.00 (1)
Full Process Small Square Bales	2.15–2.15	2.15 (1)	2.15 (1)			
Full Process Round Bales	19.50–19.50	19.50 (1)	19.50 (1)			
Baling Big Square Bales	13.00–25.00	17.83 (6)		16.00 (1)	19.00 (2)	17.67 (3)
Baling Small Square Bales	4.00–4.00	4.00 (1)				4.00 (1)
Baling Round Bales	40.00–40.00	40.00 (1)	40.00 (1)			
Stacking	5.00–6.00	5.50 (2)		6.00 (1)		5.00 (1)

Note: Values are averages for those with multiple observations. The number of observations is in parentheses below the value.

Table 11. Miscellaneous operations in \$/hour.

Operation	Range in Rates	Statewide Average	Regional Averages			
			N	SW	SC	SE
Combine	265.00–265.00	265.00 (1)	265.00 (1)			
Tillage-Disk	100.00–100.00	100.00 (1)				100.00 (1)
Tillage-Plow	140.00–140.00	140.00 (1)				140.00 (1)
Dirt Work-Scraping	250.00–250.00	250.00 (1)	250.00 (1)			

Note: Values are averages for those with multiple observations. The number of observations is in parentheses below the value.

Table 12. Trucking operations.

Operation	Range in Rates	Statewide Average	Regional Averages			
			N	SW	SC	SE
Trucking-Dollars/Ton	10.00–10.00	10.00 (1)		10.00 (1)		
Trucking-Dollars/Hour	130.00–130.00	130.00 (1)	130.00 (1)			

Note: Values are averages for those with multiple observations. The number of observations is in parentheses below the value.

Table 13. Estimating a machinery rental rate for items not surveyed.

The following worksheet can be used to estimate a rental value for equipment items not shown above.		
1. Custom charge (includes labor, fuel, tractor)	\$ _____/acre	\$18.75
2. Percent of custom charge that is for interest, insurance, depreciation, and repairs (to exclude fuel and labor) (use 60% for tillage, 65% for planting and harvesting)	x _____%	x 60%
3. Rental value, for tractor and implement (1 x 2)	= \$ _____/acre	= \$11.25
4. Tractor rental value, if tractor is not provided: _____ hp x \$ _____ per hp-hour rental rate (see above) / _____ acres/hour = Ex: 150 hp x \$.33 (per hp-hour rental rate) /15 acres/hour = \$3.30	– \$ _____/acre	– \$3.30
5. Implement rental value, without tractor (3 minus 4)	= \$ _____/acre	= \$7.95/acre

This example is copied from Iowa State University Extension and Outreach's 2025 Iowa Farm Custom Rate Survey: <https://www.extension.iastate.edu/agdm/crops/pdf/a3-10.pdf>

Table 14. Small-Acreage operations in \$/hour.

Operation	Range in Rates	Statewide Average	Regional Averages			
			N	SW	SC	SE
Small Acreage Pasture Management (55ac, Dollars/Month)	500.00–500.00	500.00 (1)		500.00 (1)		
Spray Small Acreage (with Truck, Trailer, and Chemical, Dollars/Hour)	65.00–65.00	65.00 (1)		65.00 (1)		
Hay-Swath and Bale Small Acreage (Dollars/Hour)	75.00–75.00	75.00 (1)		75.00 (1)		

Note: Values are averages for those with multiple observations. The number of observations is in parentheses below the value.

Estimating Rates for Equipment Rentals or Other Operations

Although it is typically the case that the custom operator that is hired to implement an operation uses their own equipment, there are also times when custom hire is not an option and machinery must be rented instead. Table 13 is essentially a template with an example of a “tandem disk” that can be used for machine rental rates. This template can also be used for estimating the cost of operations that are not covered in this bulletin.

Discussion of Survey Results

Beyond the numbers, there are a few important items to consider when deciding whether to do it yourself or hire it out.

Scale matters. Custom rates can vary greatly depending on the number of acres and the number of miles an operator must travel to get to you. In southwestern Idaho, we heard from an individual who opted to charge by the hour or month for jobs on extremely small acreage (information included in Table 14). As more first-time and retired landowners enter the region, we expect this type of arrangement to become more common.

Quality matters. Not all equipment or equipment operators are made equal. Ask yourself: Should a professional with new equipment and a good track record work for the same price as your neighbor? In some cases, yes; in other cases, probably not.

Timing matters. Do you have enough time available to accomplish all of your objectives? If not, hiring out may be necessary to complete all your tasks on your preferred timeline.

Relationships matter. Sometimes, an extra dollar/acre is worth maintaining a relationship with the custom operator you've used for years. It's easy to take the reliable option for granted, but it's prudent to make sure you know what you're getting into when you make a change.

Further Reading

Idaho AgBiz website, University of Idaho Department of Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology: <https://www.uidaho.edu/cals/idaho-agbiz>.

Iowa State University. 2025 Iowa Farm Custom Rate Survey: <https://www.extension.iastate.edu/agdm/crops/pdf/a3-10.pdf>.

Patterson, P., and K. Painter. 2015. *Custom Rates for Idaho Agricultural Operations: 2013–14* (BUL 729). Moscow, ID: University of Idaho Extension. 19 p. <https://www.uidaho.edu/extension/publications/publication-detail?id=bul0729>.

United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service. Farm Income and Wealth Statistics: <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/farm-income-and-wealth-statistics/data-files-us-and-state-level-farm-income-and-wealth-statistics>.

University of Idaho. Machinery Cost Calculator: <https://www.uidaho.edu/cals/idaho-agbiz/resources/tools>.

Acknowledgment

The authors appreciate and would like to acknowledge the cooperation of the farmers, custom operators, and other agribusinesses who willingly took part in the survey upon which this publication is based.

Issued in furtherance of cooperative extension work in agriculture and home economics, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Barbara Petty, Director of University of Idaho Extension, University of Idaho, Moscow, Idaho 83844. It is U of I policy to prohibit and eliminate discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, sexual orientation and gender identity/expression, age, disability, or status as a Vietnam-era veteran. This policy applies to all programs, services, and facilities, and includes, but is not limited to, applications, admissions, access to programs and services, and employment.

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