2025 Idaho Logging and Forestry Contracting Business Survey

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INTRODUCTION

Logging businesses in Idaho perform timber harvesting and fuel reduction treatments on the state's 21.5 million acres of forestland and supply raw material to its $2.5 billion forest products industry which employs more than 30,000 people. We conducted a survey of Idaho logging and forestry contracting businesses during spring and summer of 2025 in cooperation with the Associated Logging Contractors of Idaho (ALC), Inc. to better understand owner and employee demographics, business structure, capital investment, equipment used, and challenges faced.

The survey was distributed to ALC members and received a 19% response rate, with 31 responses from logging businesses and four from forestry contractors.

RESULTS

Owners and managers averaged 57 years of age, and 20% were retirement age (65 years or older) (**Fig. 1**). Most (85%) had 20 or more years of experience in the logging and forestry contracting industry. Among owners and managers, fewer than 10% had not completed high school, 42% were high school graduates, 22% had attended some college, and 28% were college graduates.

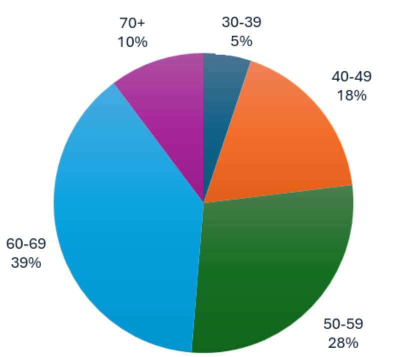

Fig. 1: Logging and forestry contracting business owner and manager ages (yr) in Idaho, 2025.

Businesses employed an average of eight workers. Most (78%) employed at least one family member, with an average of 1.8 relatives per business. Employees averaged 50 years of age. More than half of employees (54%) were equipment operators, followed by truck drivers (23%). Fewer than half (44%) of businesses employed chainsaw fallers.

Eighty-eight percent of businesses reported harvesting merchantable timber, primarily on public (48%) and private (32%) lands, with some work also occurring on corporate and tribal lands. Only 27% reported harvesting woody biomass, and those operations were concentrated on private lands. The main reasons for harvesting woody biomass were reducing fire hazard and meeting landowner objectives. Average tract size was 144 acres for merchantable timber and 145 acres for woody biomass.

About 65% of businesses used mechanical felling, and nearly half used a tracked feller-buncher. Most (62%) used grapple skidders. Common processing equipment included dangle head processors (35%) and stroke delimbers (30%), while nearly half of businesses also performed processing with chainsaws. Average production of merchantable timber was 28 loads per week (**Fig. 2**). Although most businesses produced fewer than 25 loads per week, 21% produced 100 or more loads and accounted for 62% of total harvest volume. Woody biomass harvesting businesses produced about 15 loads per week of woody biomass. Around 71% of woody biomass harvesting businesses integrate their harvest with logging operations. Twenty-nine percent only harvested woody biomass.

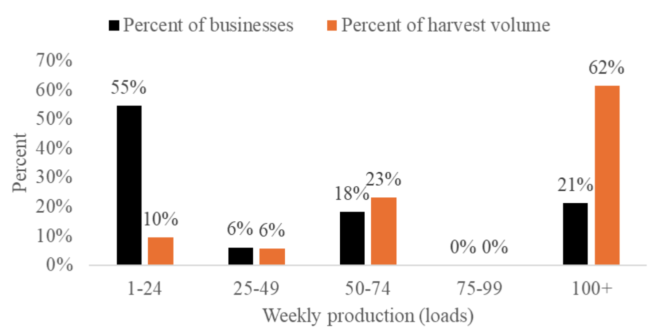

Fig. 2: Average weekly production by Idaho logging and forestry contracting businesses.

Businesses reported an average capital investment of $2.2 million, with investments ranging from $75,000 to $12 million (**Fig. 3**). About 40% had invested more than $2 million, while another 40% had invested less than $500,000. To manage rising costs from the past five years, 27% reported receiving local, state, or federal support through subsidies, tax credits, or low-interest loans. Forty percent reduced the number of machines operating, 16% reduced their workforce, and 16% purchased more efficient equipment, while approximately 35% made no changes. In 2024, 46% of businesses reported being profitable, 22% broke even, and 36% reported being unprofitable.

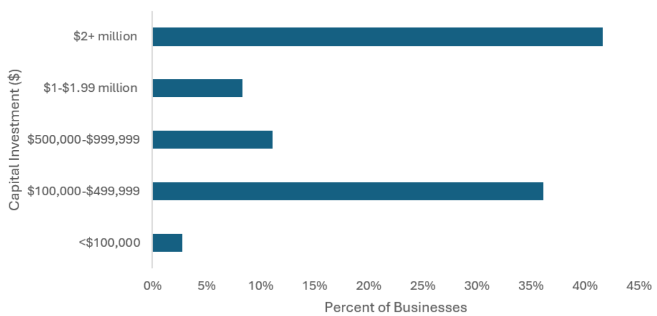

Fig. 3: Capital investment by Idaho logging and forestry contracting businesses, 2025.

Over the next five years, 65% of businesses expect to remain in operation. Most plan to maintain current production levels or expand production without adding crews. Only 6% of owners indicated that they plan to reduce production. Of the 35% of businesses not continuing operations in five years, 71% indicated they were retiring. These individuals averaged 63 years of age. Of those not continuing operations but not retiring, 36% planned to pursue better opportunities. This number exceeds 100% due to some owners providing multiple responses.

CONCLUSION

We estimate that adequate logging capacity exists to supply Idaho's forest products industry at current or expanded production levels. However, challenges exist to maintain or expand logging capacity in the coming years. Almost half of logging business owners are 60 years old or older, and 35% expected to retire or otherwise leave the industry by 2030. Aging workers and rising costs are a nationwide challenge. There has been minimal participation in woody biomass harvesting, making the implementation of forest fuel reduction treatments problematic.

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