



PROPANE OFFERS A STRONG SOLUTION FOR SMALL OPERATION

A PROPANE CASE STUDY

DAVIS MOWING SERVICE WINS BUSINESS, OUTBIDS THE COMPETITOR WITH PROPANE

Davis Mowing Service is a small, family-owned landscape contractor just outside of Madison, Wisconsin. Owner Scott Davis started the business in 2004, and today the company maintains nearly 100 properties during peak season and employs four to five staff during the summer.

BUDGETING FOR A SMALL BUSINESS

Like many small businesses, Davis Mowing Service has always been focused on finding new ways to save money and lower its total cost of operation. Davis began to closely monitor fuel expenses, and when gas prices continued to rise, he began to seek more affordable alternatives.

“I heard good things about propane and the potential savings I could see from adopting the fuel,” said Davis. “In 2012, there was a dealer going out of business in the area who had a brand new propane-powered Ferris mower for sale and I went

for it. Now we save approximately \$2.50 per hour mowing with propane and have continued to see that cost differential due to the decreasing cost of propane.”

In addition to fuel savings, incentives offered by the Propane Education & Research Council and local and state associations allowed Davis Mowing Service to significantly reduce its upfront equipment costs. The operation was awarded a \$1,000 incentive from PERC’s Propane Mower Incentive Program as well as a \$500 incentive from the state of Wisconsin.

COMPANY

Davis Mowing Service
Sauk City, Wisconsin

CHALLENGE & SOLUTION

As a small landscape contractor, Davis Mowing Service was looking for simple ways to reduce operating costs while remaining competitive. Lower operating costs with propane have allowed the company to save money and outbid competitors.

RESULT

- Davis Mowing Service has saved approximately \$2.50 per hour mowing with propane compared with gasoline.
- The Propane Mower Incentive Program, in addition to state incentives, allowed the contractor to recoup \$1,500 in upfront costs.
- Clean, reliable propane allowed Davis Mowing Service to reduce downtime and maintenance, resulting in a lower total cost of operation.

"Today, we operate two propane-powered mowers: the Ferris IS 3100ZP zero-turn mower we bought in 2012 and a Gravely Pro-Master XDZ 260H LP zero-turn mower we acquired in the summer of 2014," Davis said. "We primarily use the two propane-powered mowers, and we try to keep the other five gas mowers in the shed if we can."

REFUELING WITH A LOCAL RETAILER

Like many landscapers new to propane, Davis first attempted to refuel his propane mower at a local gas station in town. However, with propane, it's best to work with a local propane retailer to develop a refueling system that works. Contractors can choose from a cylinder exchange program, cylinder refill program, or install onsite refueling infrastructure — all of which involve propane delivery direct to the contractor's doorstep.

"Refueling with propane has been just as easy and more efficient than with gasoline because I no longer make daily trips to the gas station," Davis said. "This reduces downtime and allows more time to mow. For a small operation like ours, taking time to refuel can really add up, especially when staff is already tight."

"We have a 500-gallon tank on site that our retailer keeps full at all times. This allows us to fill our own cylinders without ever leaving," Davis said. "Our staff is fully trained, and frankly, propane is a safe fuel to handle. Unlike gasoline or diesel, propane can't be spilled or easily pilfered, eliminating the environmental threat posed by pooling chemicals and reducing the risk of theft."

PROPANE: A CLEAN, RELIABLE FUEL

Davis Mowing Service does 90 percent of its maintenance in-house, including oil changes, maintaining blades, and checking tire pressure. So far, Davis Mowing Service's propane mowers have been easier to maintain than its other gasoline models, leading to reduced downtime and additional cost savings.

"Because propane is such a clean fuel, we have chosen to extend our service intervals on our propane-powered machines," Davis said. "Not only that, but the oil still comes out clean when compared with the black oil from the gas machines."

Last summer, Davis had a gasoline engine break down due to poor fuel quality. "We took the mower into the shop and discovered that the fuel we had been using contained ethanol, which caused damage to the machine," Davis said.

Damaging effects of ethanol-based fuels on small engine equipment can be serious, and can put mowers out of commission for extended periods of time. Ethanol can cause internal engine component corrosion and speed up fuel system degradation, to the point of premature failure. Additionally, when used in small engines, ethanol blends require the use of a fuel stabilizer.



"Propane is a completely ethanol-free fuel. Using propane ensures we won't harm our equipment with corrosive fuels, and will keep our mowers running efficiently throughout the mowing season," Davis said.

EDGING OUT THE COMPETITORS

Propane allowed Davis Mowing Service to drastically lower its total cost of operation, but that's not the only way the fuel has paid off for the landscaping business. In 2013, Davis was able to secure the business of a local school district after outbidding the competition.

"When I found out a school district in the area was putting out a bid for its landscaping business, I was able to offer a lower price and outbid my competition," Davis said. "The competitor — who I've known my whole life — asked how I got the bid so low. I told him that the savings I was seeing with propane has allowed me to also pass along savings to customers."

Davis Mowing Service reports that the school district, as well as other customers, have had positive reactions to its use of propane, and are happy to benefit from the fuel's savings and environmental friendliness. Propane-powered mowers reduce greenhouse gas emissions by more than 15 percent and carbon monoxide emissions by more than 40 percent compared with gasoline-fueled mowers.

"As my mowers reach retirement, my goal is to transition them all over to propane," Davis said. "There's no reason not to — propane is a perfect fit for a landscaping business like ours. It's clean, cost-effective, and reliable."

FOR MORE INFORMATION

To learn more about propane-powered lawn care equipment and the Propane Education & Research Council, visit propane.com/commercial-landscape.

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