

Michigan Logger's Eco Log Harvester Gets Plaudits from Landowners, Mills

Miller Logging and Runnin Gears Dealership Partner with Scandinavian Forestry Equipment

By Tim Cox



Felling with Eco Log 590F harvester in a stand of red pine. Miller Logging added the machine to increase production. Eco Log is a Swedish manufacturer of cut-to-length forestry harvesters and forwarders. The machines are distributed in the U.S. by Scandinavian Forestry Equipment.

HARRISON, Michigan – Josee Miller came up with some terminology to describe the kind of service he provides to landowners when he buys and harvests the timber: Timber Stand Improvement. His company's Eco Log 590F harvester from Scandinavian Forestry Equipment is making it easier to help clients improve their forest lands.

Miller Logging is based in Harrison, Michigan, which is nearly in the middle of the Lower Peninsula. The company has a 35,000 square foot building on 30 acres that contains an office, shop, and a showroom for affiliated equipment dealership, Runnin

Gears.

Miller Logging has nine employees, including Josee, 48. It is a family affair: all but two employees are family-related. Josee's son, Bradee, operates the Eco Log harvester. Another son, Lijah, works in the office doing data entry and helping manage the company's books along with Harvey Chandler. Josee's brother, Jamee, is the company's dedicated mechanic but also can operate equipment. A cousin, Joel Miller, and his son, Shane, operate equipment for the tree-length crew. Joel's brother, John, drives a truck for the company but is a sub-

contractor, not an employee. Kyle Disney operates a forwarder for the company.

Miller Logging operates two crews, and Josee likes to aim for producing 500 tons – about 10 loads – per week for each. If the need arises he can put a third crew to work.

Josee grew up in a logging family; his father, Jim, worked in logging off and on his entire life, buying his first chainsaw when he was 12. Jim did construction work when Josee was in high school. Josee graduated early to begin logging with his father and his cousin, John, in 1993. They started out

with a chainsaw, a \$600 dump truck, and a forwarder.

The following year Jim launched an equipment dealership, Runnin Gears, selling Franklin and Hood logging equipment; the same year they transitioned to tree-length logging and added a Franklin shear and skidders and a self-propelled Hood slasher to their logging business along with a new self-loading truck, and Joel joined the company. A year later they were the No. 1 pulpwood supplier to the S.D. Warren – later Scott Paper – mill in Muskegon. They constructed their building in 1999 and moved into it in 2000, just before Jim, Josee and Joel incorporated Runnin Gears Inc. and Miller Logging Inc.

Sappi acquired the Muskegon mill in 2000 and within a few years trimmed the prices they were paying for pulp. Josee already thought prices were too low and began looking for new markets. They began supplying wood to mills for International Paper, Packaging Corp. of America, and Louisiana-Pacific. Changing markets im-

acted the company's timber purchasing strategy. They also bought a chipper because landowners wanted the logging slash chipped. For a while they supplied chips to Packaging Corp. of America until the mill went back to buying round wood.

Miller Logging added cut-to-length logging equipment in 2006: a used John Deere 653 harvester with a Fabtek attachment and a Tree Farmer 632 forwarder. The company ran that combination until Jim died of a heart attack at age 63 in 2010.

Today, one crew is equipped with the Eco Log 590F harvester and Timberjack and John Deere forwarders. The other crew, which does tree-length logging, is equipped with a Tigercat 724 feller buncher, a Tigercat 620 skidder, and a Hood S182 loader-slasher; large limbs are removed with a chainsaw while the smaller ones can be removed with a pull-through delimeter on the Hood S182 trailer. The third crew, when operating, can use a Barko 240 track harvester with a JP Skidmore cut-to-length head and a Timberjack 1410 forwarder. The

company has two self-loading trucks and two semi-tractors and trailers to deliver all its production.

The two crews normally work on separate jobs. If a timber sale is big enough, notably on state land, they may work together. The company usually operates the third crew just a few months out of the year.

Josee buys about half his timber from private landowners and half from state timber sales. He is beginning to look into bidding on timber sales on federal land. Portions of the Manistee and Huron-Manistee national forests are located west of Harrison.

The terrain in the middle of the Lower Peninsula is "all over the place," said Josee. It ranges from low, soft ground to a bit hilly and sandy. Even hills may have soft ground on the summit. The dominant tree species are aspen, soft maple, and black oak. A typical job is 40-50 acres. A state timber sale may be 100-200 acres but will be divided into smaller parcels of about 20-25 acres. The company generally harvests about 25-30 percent saw logs and the rest pulp on a typical job.

Josee agreed to be a servicing dealer for SFE before purchasing the Eco Log harvester. "Greg (Porter, owner and CEO of Scandinavian Forestry Equipment) needed a salesman in Lower Michigan," he recalled.

It was an easy decision after that to invest in an Eco Log harvester to increase production, although Josee did consider other brands. "I considered it a bonus to be able to deal with the owner rather than a dealership, and having that direct relationship," he said.

Greg rented an Eco Log 590D so Josee's son, Bradee, could train on it. Josee and his son visited a logger in Pennsylvania who was operating an Eco Log 590F in order to get a first-hand look at it, and in 2021 they pulled the trigger on purchasing a new Eco Log 590F.

"It's far surpassed our expectations," said Josee. Fuel economy is the "number one" thing he likes about it. The harvester is powered by a Volvo Penta 320 hp engine. As Josee noted, diesel engines "like their fuel." However, his son just recently reported the machine uses about 3.7-4 gallons of fuel per hour. "That's a lot less than other machines doing the same thing," said Josee.

After fuel economy, he mentioned the machine's reliability and dependability. "It's rarely given us a problem," he said, and the harvester now has about 2,500 hours. "Some of that is the operator," added Josee.



From left to right, Josee Miller, his son, Bradee, who operates the Eco Log 590F harvester, and Josee's brother, Jamee, the company's mechanic.



Eco Log 590F processes a tree. The machine is the largest in the Eco Log 500 series of F-harvesters. The machine is equipped with a Log Max 7000C harvester attachment, which features the Hultdins Supercut saw unit.

His son is meticulous when it comes to servicing the harvester at routine maintenance intervals. With any heavy equipment, “You’ll have way less down time if you service it at recommended intervals.”

The Eco Log 590F is equipped with a Log Max 7000C harvester head, a dangle attachment. The harvester features the Hultdins Supercut saw unit.

The dangle head is an advantage in thinnings, said Josee, because the operator can reach around the tree and back-cut it instead of maneuvering the machine to both sides of the tree. “All dangle heads are that way,” observed Josee, who considered other harvester brands, “but it’s a major advantage to it.”

Eco Log is a Swedish manufacturer of cut-to-length forestry harvesters and forwarders. It began manufacturing logging equipment in 1986. Eco Log machines are distributed in the U.S. by Scandinavian Forestry Equipment, which is headquartered in Manchester, Pennsylvania.

The Eco Log 590F is the largest model in the 500 series of F-harvesters. The Stage V Volvo Penta engine is designed for high performance, reliability and fuel efficiency. The hydrostatic transmission transfers power to all six wheels in three speeds. The harvester’s hydraulic system features an 180 cc pump for the crane and an 190 cc pump for the harvesting attachment. The crane can reach 33-36 feet and has more than 228,000

foot pounds of force.

The Eco Log 500 series of harvesters features a unique pendulum arm suspension system to give operators complete control over their work by leveling and adjusting the machines to prevailing ground conditions whatever the terrain. Ground clearance can be adjusted from 4 inches to almost 4



Fuel economy is the ‘number one’ thing Josee Miller likes about the Eco Log 590F harvester. It is powered by a Volvo Penta 320 hp engine. The harvester has been using about 3.7-4 gallons of fuel per hour, according to Miller Logging.

feet.

Scandinavian Forestry Equipment now has three dealers in the Great Lakes Region, two serving New England and the Northeast, and one in Montana. In addition to being a distributor for Eco Log forestry machines, Scandinavian Forestry Equipment offers Eltec track harvesters and FECON forestry mulching equipment. The company represents a wide range of manufacturers of timber cutting and harvesting attachments, including Log Max, Quadco, Southstar, Waratah, and JPS Saw Systems, and also offers Cranab and Hultdins cranes and grapples. Scandinavian Forestry Equipment also represents the Sany line of construction equipment. The company’s focus is to help customers determine their precise needs and then find an equipment solution for them. It is common practice for team members to visit logging job sites to get a first-hand perspective on a contractor’s operations.

(For more information about Scandinavian Forestry Equipment and the products it offers, visit www.scandforestry.com.)

The Eco Log 590F harvester has no drive shaft, noted Josee. “That’s huge out in the woods. One less thing to break.” With its cab in the center of the machine, the harvester can reach out 30 feet and still float on soft ground, he added. That’s important because Michigan has been experiencing milder winters, and the ground remains relatively soft instead of frozen hard. Josee’s son, Bradee, also favored the Eco Log con-



Josee Miller.

trols and computer system.

The pendulum suspension system also makes it easy to perform service on the machine since it can be raised or lowered. “We looked all over before we bought one,” said Josee, and thought, ‘That’s the cat’s meow.’”

Miller Logging supplies wood to three large pulp mills in Lower Michigan – Weyerhaeuser, Packaging Corporation of America, and ARAUCO; Weyerhaeuser and ARAUCO have mills in Grayling, about 45 miles north, and the PCA mill is in Manistee, about 90 miles west on the shore of Lake Michigan. Saw logs are currently being supplied to Maple Rapids Lumber Mill, about 75 miles south. Low-grade logs are supplied to mills that make material for pallets and crates. The company also sells firewood in 8-foot lengths by the truckload.

Markets are “not looking good this year,” observed Josee. “We’re still selling everything and cutting everything we can, but prices have been cut several times for pulp and saw logs.” Some of the price cutting by mills has been related to a fuel surcharge they paid when fuel prices escalated last year.

“Good demand last year created bonuses for pulp,” added Josee. “When that happens, people stop sorting for saw logs to get that bonus, and log prices go up. But around the first of the year, things changed

and went the other way.” The company’s two crews are still operating, but business is “just not as profitable.”

At the time Josee talked with *TimberLine*, the Eco Log 590F was working on a tract of about 70 acres, mostly red pine with some spruce. The timber was being harvested for the Biewer Lumber sawmill in nearby McBain. Miller Logging also harvests timber for Weyerhaeuser and a few other sawmills.

“The mills like (the Eco Log harvester),” he added. “It’s very accurate on lengths.”

The Eco Log harvester also has proven a hit with landowners whose timber Josee buys. “Landowners love us,” he said. “When the machine hits the ground and they see what it can do,” notably being able to work without damaging residual trees. They are very pleased and end up referring Josee’s company to other landowners.

On private land, Josee came up with an idea for the logging slash. The crews use the skidder grapple and forwarder boom to accumulate it into small piles – “critter piles” – to benefit small game like rabbit and grouse. There’s usually not much slash, Josee noted, as the pulp mills will take wood down to 4 inches in diameter. On state timber sales, the loggers are required to leave the slash strewn evenly throughout a trace.

Josee promotes Timber Stand Improvement, a term he advertises on the Miller Logging website. As he explained, tracts of timber frequently have been cut several times in the past, but loggers may have only removed the biggest and best trees. They left “junk” trees in the residual stand; those remaining trees will need to be cut in the future when they are mature, but they will not be very valuable.

“We take out the dead, dying, damaged, diseased,” said Josee. Then we look at the grade timber and select cut that. Our

approach leaves a stand of residual timber that is young in growth, around 10-inch stems, that in 35 years will be worth something again.”

Miller Logging does Timber Stand Improvement on about 90 percent of the private timber it purchases. “The landowners are very appreciative of that,” said Josee. “Maybe all we cut on a job is the pulp wood, but we leave a young, healthy stand that will increase in value in the future.”

Josee is a member of the Michigan Association of Timbermen and is a certified Michigan Master Logger. He currently serves on the association committee that oversees the Master Logger certification program.

A typical day for Josee starts at the office and going through the mail that was delivered the previous day. He spends time lining up timber to look at and going to look at timber. Most afternoons he is driving a truck to haul wood.

In his free time Josee enjoys camping with his family, riding side-by-side ATVs, and fishing. The family has a permanent campsite near Manistee.

The company holds monthly safety meetings at the office. They are put on by a loss control representative for the Michigan Association of Timbermen’s self-insured fund.

Employees are eligible for paid vacation. “We are family,” said Josee. “Even those employees who are not related are treated like family. Life happens. If someone has to be there for their family on a certain day, they can do that with no repercussions. Other companies are not very forgiving when it comes to that.”

Mill personnel have told Josee that his company is “probably the most consistent logging crew” they have. They show up and do what they’re supposed to. “We don’t shoot for the moon,” said Josee. “I tell them exactly what we can do, and we do it.” 



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