



August 2009

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Acreage Living is published monthly. Please share it with your acreage neighbors. Call your local ISU Extension Office for more information or contact an ISU Extension staff member listed below to suggest topics for future articles.

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Keeping a Roof Overhead

By Cynthia Fletcher, ISU professor of Human Development & Family Studies

Keeping a roof overhead is an important concern when your income drops. If you rank your bills in order of priority, chances are housing is at or near the top of the list.

When you are under the financial stress of reduced or lost income, one of the biggest expenses is housing. Housing expenses include mortgage or rent payments, insurance, taxes, household maintenance and repair, utility bills, furnishings and cleaning supplies.

When income drops, careful planning can help you avoid the loss of your house.

Mortgage Payments

With reduced or lost income, you quickly feel the stress of a sizable mortgage payment on your finances. If your loss of income will only be for a few months, you may be able to cut back on other expenses and continue to meet your mortgage payments.

Important: *If you miss a mortgage payment, you have defaulted on your contract and your lender can begin foreclosure on your home.*

If meeting your mortgage payment appears impossible, contact your lender immediately before you miss a payment. You may be able to skip a payment or arrange a lower payment. Go in person and take along a new spending plan that fits your reduced income.

Most lenders would rather avoid the time and cost involved in a foreclosure if another alternative can be worked out. If your loss of

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income is going to last a long time or be permanent, you will need to consider other options. You do not have to live under the extreme stress and strain of meeting mortgage payments that are too high. Some options are:

- Taking in a boarder and using the money toward mortgage payments.
- Renting your house to someone else and renting less costly housing for yourself. (Check the effect this will have on taxes and changes needed on insurance coverage.)
- Selling your house and buying or renting less costly housing.
- Moving in with relatives or friends. Offer to share some of the housing costs.
- Deeding your house back to the lender. You may not lose much. For example, if you have been paying on a 30-year mortgage for 10 years, you have not paid for much of the house yet, only about 10 percent. If you choose deeding the house back to the lender in lieu of foreclosure, and the house has decreased in value, you are still responsible for the total amount of the loan and must pay the lender the difference. If by staying in this house you will not have enough money for food or other necessities, you may find it less stressful to leave the house and find less expensive housing.

Other Housing Costs: Insurance Payments

Homeowner's insurance protects you in case of loss or damage to

property. During times of reduced income, it is important to have property insured. If you cannot make an insurance premium payment, call or write your agent or the company. There may be some leeway (10 to 30 day "grace period") for a late premium payment. Not paying insurance on your mortgaged home is considered defaulting on the mortgage.



Shopping around for property insurance from a lower priced, licensed insurer can save you money.

Contact the Iowa Insurance Division and ask for a list showing typical prices charged by different licensed companies. Call at least three of the lowest-priced insurers to learn what they would charge you for the coverage you need. Make sure you purchase enough coverage to replace the house and contents. Make certain the new policy is in effect before dropping the old one.

If your current company offers you the least expensive coverage, talk to your agent. Explain your situation and discuss different payment plans. Check the possibility of smaller premiums through:

- Changing to a monthly,

quarterly or semiannual payment plan with the same coverage. There may be a service charge for making a smaller payment, which is based on the amount of the payment. Check the total yearly amount difference and select the payment plan that will give you the most savings and still fit into your spending plan.

- Increasing the deductible.
- Installing safety/security alarm systems.
- Examining coverage on other buildings and structures on your property.
- Changing to a more basic coverage.
- Qualifying for discounts if all insurance (house and auto) is with the same company.

Real Estate Taxes

If you are unable to pay taxes, contact your local county treasurer to learn about procedures used when property taxes are delinquent. Interest accumulates on unpaid taxes and you will have to pay this interest or it becomes a lien on your property just like the unpaid taxes. You will receive notice of any actions taken as a result of nonpayment of taxes. Take these notices seriously. Eventually, unpaid taxes will result in the sale of your property through auction.

Utility Payments

Utility cutoffs can occur for nonpayment. Disconnection varies with weather and family health conditions. If you cannot make full payments on your utility bill:

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- Contact the company right away before the due date and before fuel is needed.
- Propose a new payment plan based on your current ability to pay. Take along information about your income and expenses when you go to your utility company.
- Explore a load management program or off-hour rate program to see if it would save you money and meet your needs.
- Ask your utility company to conduct an energy audit for free or for a reasonable charge. An audit can identify ways for you to save money on home heating and cooling.
- Check to see if any agencies operate a low income energy assistance program for which you might qualify.
- Talk with family members to decide how to safely reduce the use of your utilities to reduce costs. Health and safety considerations for family members are very important.

Telephone Bills

If you are unable to pay your

phone bill on time, call the phone number listed on the bill and explain the problem. Unless you pay the bill or make other arrangements with the company, you will receive a Notice of Disconnection with the date your phone service will stop if the bill is not paid.

If you pay the bill late, you might incur an extra charge. If your phone is disconnected, you will have to pay the bill plus interest on the unpaid balance before your phone service is restored. You may be allowed one free re-connection each year, otherwise you will have to pay the cost for re-connection.

Cut phone expenses by eliminating all non-emergency long distance calls or writing a letter instead. When making necessary long distance calls, check when rates are lowest and make your calls during those hours. If you are paying for local telephone service based on the calls you make, you can cut the cost by limiting the number and/or length of the phone calls. Consider buying rather than renting your phone, returning all rented phones except one, or changing to a less expensive type of

phone service. Check your local phone bill to see if you have optional services you do not really need.

Cell phones and related service plans have become a major budget item for many families. In times of reduced income, consider dropping cell phone service plans or reduce plan costs, for example reducing the number of minutes in the plan, if additional charges will not be incurred. Or consider removing residential telephone service and relying totally on a cell phone for communication to reduce total expenses.

Cable Service

If you have cable or satellite service, have the service disconnected or choose only basic service. Remember, there usually is a charge to reconnect your service.

Careful planning can help you keep a roof overhead.



Handling Large Round Bales

By Charles Schwab, ISU professor of Agricultural and Biosystems Engineering

Large round bales accent Iowa's landscape and add a unique hazard to those harvesting and

transporting forage. Large round bales are bulky as well as heavy, weighing typically 1,500 to 2,000

pounds. Bales are compact and dense, and usually reach a

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diameter of five to six feet. They are designed to repel rain and prevent spoilage; however, they also easily roll down hills or off equipment causing serious injuries or sometimes death.

Monster Momentum

The first important rule is to never try to stop a rolling bale, even with a tractor. A bale will pick up speed and gain momentum as it moves down any hill or slope. Never put yourself in front of a bale heading down a hill. You wouldn't jump in front of a truck free-wheeling down a hill; likewise, don't try to stop a large round bale. You don't have enough mass to stop that bale from reaching the bottom of the slope, so don't try.

Steady as She Goes

The large size and weight of round bales affect the stability of equipment used to handle them. A second important rule is to check the owner's manual for recommendations about the size of the tractor and loader required to safely lift and transport large round bales. Improper matching of equipment and load creates a potential for serious injuries.

Once matched, adjust the tractor wheels to the suggested setting and add the proper ballast to assure that the tractor can maintain balance and avoid rollover. Always use a tractor that has a

rollover protective structure (ROPS) when moving bales. A tractor without ROPS is a fatality waiting to happen.

Heavy End Up

When moving bales with a tractor, keep the bale on the up-slope side of the tractor. This will provide the best stability for the tractor to prevent an overturn. To accomplish this, put the transmission in reverse to back up a hill when using a rear-mounted spike. Back down a hill when using a front-end loader. Avoid driving across any slope while transporting a large round bale. Cross-slope travel creates the highest potential for a tractor rollover.

Low and Slow

Go low and slow when moving large round bales. Drive slowly to avoid sudden movements and turns, which are exaggerated by a heavy load and can cause the tractor to roll over. Keep the bale low to maintain balance. The weight of the bale, if not kept low, will raise the center of gravity of your equipment and increase your chances of an overturn. Traveling over rough ground, stumps or ruts can also cause a tractor carrying a large round bale to overturn.

Grapple With It

Lastly, always use a grapple hook with a front-end loader to transport large round bales. A

grapple hook will prevent the bale from rolling back onto the loader arms and crushing the operator. Using a tractor with a cab or a four-post rollover protective structure will provide additional security. A rear-mounted loading spike might be a better choice because it eliminates the danger of rollback associated with a front-end loader. A rear spike also does not block the operator's forward vision and places the load on the large back tires of the tractor. Make the choices right for your operation. Remember the important rules and the key operational steps to remain safe with large round bales.



Additional information:

Large Round Bale Safety – Virginia Cooperative Extension <http://pubs.ext.vt.edu/442/442-455/442-455.pdf>

Handling Big Bales Safely – Farm Safety Association http://www.farmsafety.ca/factsheets/handling_bigbales.pdf

Large Round Bales: Safety – University of Missouri Extension <http://extension.missouri.edu/explorepdf/agguides/agengin/g01957.pdf>

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Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914 in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Jack M. Payne, director, Cooperative Extension Service, Iowa State University of Science and Technology, Ames, Iowa.