

WHAT OUR USERS ARE SAYING

The grounds maintenance department at Maize United School District 266, a school district with more than 6,600 students in Maize, Kan., has significant ground to cover: 720 acres to be exact.

Nearly 100 acres need regular mowing and maintenance, a task for which they use a fleet of five Grasshopper 900 Series diesel mowers.

"We have several key sites throughout the district that require special attention," says grounds manager Kevin Smith.

Most of those sites are sports fields and surrounding sports facilities. With several campuses and multiple facilities at each campus, the mowing situation can be intense.

"When you're mowing sports fields, you have to be on and off quickly, because someone always wants to practice," he says. "Not only that, but we have to keep them in good working condition for the players and looking good for the spectators."

Smith says that the Grasshoppers do a fine job at mowing grass, which is crucial for the sports complexes.

"You always have someone who wants it done differently or better, but from where I sit, the Grasshoppers are the best mowing equipment we've ever used," he says. "They may not cut as fast as others, but you only have to mow one pass, which saves us time in the long run."

Smith is most impressed with the mowers' ability to get in and under trees with the FrontMount™ decks. The school properties are home to large numbers of trees, mainly cedars and pines that have branches and limbs that grow close to the ground, and the Grasshoppers have eliminated most cleanup trimming time.



If we didn't have the Grasshoppers, we'd be out there trimming around trees for two whole days.

In addition to mowing, all five Grasshoppers are equipped with dozer blades for snow removal and the district has one rotary broom, which is specifically used for removing sand from a track.

"They are great at snow removal," Smith says. "When the snow falls, the custodians usually have the sidewalks cleared before we get to the parking lots, which saves us time. They definitely save us man-hours, regardless of what we use them for."

Reducing man-hours was one of the primary goals the district was intent on achieving when they reevaluated the grounds maintenance program: reducing man-hours for greater efficiency, and reducing fuel consumption and overall emissions for sustainability.

"After we purchased our first Grasshopper, we were able to see how its efficiency could impact our overall green initiatives," says James Baker, Maize assistant superintendent of operations.

Compared to the district's previous gasoline equipment, the MaxTorque™ diesel mowers provided 50 percent more power and twice the fuel economy. Not only did the grounds department save man-hours, but it also saved fuel costs.

In addition to the fuel reduction, overall emissions related to landscape activities for the district took steep declines: a 43 percent reduction in non-methane hydrocarbons and nitrogen oxides, and a 99 percent reduction in carbon monoxide.

When combined with other energy-saving steps, the district has realized a collective savings of more than \$1.5 million over the last four years, results so impressive that the district was awarded the 2010 Clean Air and Sustainability Award by the city of Wichita and the Metro Air Quality Improvement Task Force.

In addition to the savings from reduced energy consumption, Smith says switching to Grasshopper diesel mowers has saved the district with regard to maintenance and repair costs.

"These mowers are built for longevity. They're built well, tough," he says. "They're running six or more hours every day, which is hard on any piece of equipment. But they still run like they did the first year we bought them."

When repairs are need, the commonality of parts and ease of service make the process simpler and more cost-effective. Smith says most of the repairs can be done in-house and don't require a large parts supply, which helps from a cash-flow perspective. And when it comes to regular maintenance, he is quick to point out that the PowerFold® deck lift is one of the best features.

"We absolutely love it," he says. "We try to switch out the blades every eight hours or so, and the electric lift is so much easier and safer than manual lifting, especially on the 72-inch decks."

Overall, the district has benefited – not only monetarily, but aesthetically as well – from its fleet of Grasshoppers.

"We are a big district," Smith says. "We have to have good equipment and good people to run them. We have both, and we couldn't be more pleased." ~

