



Burt Lumber, Washington, GA

Steps to Efficiency

CARRYING ON TRADITION FOR THREE GENERATIONS

Since taking the reins from their late grandfather—Addison Burt—Barry and Burt Goolsby have been on a continuous journey of improvement and automation throughout their mill's operation. Installing the VAB lineal scanner was a major step toward this goal.

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In just the last 10 years, Barry and Burt Goolsby, along with Burt's son and mill manager, "Little Burt," have upgraded the family mill several times over, including new dry kilns, an edger system, canter line, and completely overhauled the planer mill—rebuilding the Miller planer and the Lundeen stacker, and installing a new Signode strapper. Each of these projects were done with an eye toward increasing production volumes, improving quality, and ensuring the safety of their long-tenured workforce. "We're proud of what our granddaddy built, and through a series of improvements, we've been able to increase production volumes two or three times from where it was just ten years ago, ensuring that what he built will be around for many years to come," said Burt, co-owner and Projects Manager.

The Next Upgrade

So it should have been no surprise when they turned their attention to an auto grader. As a certified grader himself, Little Burt understood the difficulties associated with relying on manual grading. "It's a tough job that requires a combination of experience, judgment, and knowledge of the various grading rules. You have to make important decisions in a very short period of time." Like so many mills, Burt Lumber was struggling to find good, qualified graders, stretching the personnel they did have thin and leaving other responsibilities neglected. Little Burt knew they would be able to run the whole system faster and more efficiently if they could automate grading.

Enter the VAB lineal grader. With just a few additional modifications, the linear design of the optimizer

was going to be much easier for retrofitting than a transverse system. The simplicity and ease of use were particularly impressive to the Burt team, ensuring minimal operational confusion.

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Projector system displays, in real time, all relevant quality control information provided by the auto grader.





Left to right: Burt Goolsby, "Little Burt" Goolsby, Barry Goolsby

Not to mention the VAB team had already demonstrated they would not have any issues delivering on what had been promised, thanks to the dozens of other successful installations. This included any snags that may have arisen. "[The VAB team's] extensive knowledge of the system, along with stellar recommendations from their customers, left no doubt in my mind that any situation that might arise would be handled. Success of this project was never in question," said Barry, co-owner and President.

The VAB Lineal Grader

The VAB grading system's benefits go beyond its economical installation and ease of use. The real-time board viewer makes it simple to understand

exactly why each board received its grade. By rotating the board image 360 degrees in all directions, it's quick and easy to find, select, and analyze defects and determine whether a tweak to the parameters is required. As an added step, the system also features real-time simulations. Adjust everything from lengths, block values, and trimmer saw positions to grade parameters, fence capabilities, and product priority. Rather than having to wait on historical analysis, the real-time simulator will run a side-by-side comparison of the current recipe vs. the simulation to determine whether and how much additional uplift can be achieved.

And then there's the patented Air Board Tracker system. This contactless system provides virtual board

numbering and tracking in the lugless section between the planer and the lug loader. Boards can be flipped, moved, and rearranged without losing track of their solution. Plus, it eliminates marking and codes on the board as well as the associated additional costs like ink.

Instant Improvement

Since the VAB is a linear system, the installation portion of the project could be completed in just two weekends: one weekend for performing the belt modifications and another for installing the grader and board tracker, all with no significant production stoppage. Once installed, the team got to work tuning in the parameters and, shortly thereafter, sending solutions to the trimmer. The results were immediate. Some might think grading timbers—which makes up a significant portion of Burt's production—is easy, and a grader would not yield much uplift. But the team at Burt found it to be just the opposite. According to Barry, "This has been one of the smoothest projects—with the quickest payback—we have ever done. Installation took place over a couple of weekends, minimizing downtime. Startup was fast, and we saw immediate benefits on day one. We reduced trim loss nearly 3-fold, increased our #1s over 30%, and increased our #2s and better more than 10%." In addition to the significant uplift in value, they also achieved exactly what Little Burt thought they would: faster run-times. With the installation of the grader, they were able to achieve a 35% increase in speed and throughput, which multiplies the value of the associated grade uplift and reduces trim loss.

The Burt Lumber team may always find new ways to upgrade their mill, but to say this was a big step in the right direction is an understatement. The VAB lineal grader relieved major strains on the entire operation and has set the stage for future improvements to run at their full potential. 🌐