

Agricultural Machinery Operator interview questions

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What to expect

Interviews for agricultural machinery operator roles tend to be practical and focused on your ability to run, maintain and problem-solve machinery through a season. You may be asked to walk through your experience with specific implements, explain how you handle breakdowns, and show how you work safely around others.

- **Process:** Walking through a routine task such as setting up a seeder or conducting a pre-start check, to see how you organise work and avoid mistakes.
- **Behavioural:** Tell me about a time questions that draw out how you have handled breakdowns, weather changes or tight schedules in the past.
- **Technical:** Questions about GPS guidance, precision agriculture systems and implement calibration, testing your practical knowledge of the tools.
- **Safety:** Questions about hazard checks, working near others and livestock, and how you keep yourself and the crew safe.
- **Scenario:** A problem is described and you talk through your judgement under pressure, such as a hydraulic leak during harvest.

Typically a short phone screen, then a face-to-face or on-farm interview. You might be asked to demonstrate a pre-start check or talk through a recent repair. Some employers will have you meet the farm manager and leading hand separately, and they may ask about your availability across the season.

1. Walk me through how you set up a tractor and seeder for a day's sowing.

Why they ask

This process question checks that you have a reliable routine for pre-start checks, implement attachment and calibration, which is core to getting sowing right.

How to structure your answer

Give a clear step-by-step: pre-start checks, implement attachment, calibration, GPS guidance setup, and how you confirm everything is ready before entering the paddock.

Example answer

"First I do a walk-around of the tractor and seeder, checking oil, coolant, tyres, hydraulics and that the seeder is clean and free of leftover seed or fertiliser. I attach the seeder, connect the hydraulics and drive shaft, and check the lights and safety chains. Then I calibrate the seeding rate using the chart and a test run, and adjust the depth and press wheels for the soil conditions. I set up the GPS guidance with the correct A-B line and check the section control. Before I start, I run a short test strip and get out to check seed placement and coverage, then I am ready to go."

2. Tell me about a time you had to make a repair in the field to keep harvest going.

Why they ask

This behavioural question reveals your problem-solving under pressure and whether you can keep a harvest crew moving when something breaks.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR: Situation, Task, Action, Result. Set the scene quickly, explain what you did, and finish with the outcome for the harvest.

Example answer

"We were halfway through harvest on a tight schedule when the header started losing power. I was the operator, so I stopped and did a quick check. I found a blocked fuel filter and a loose wire on the sensor. I isolated the machine, replaced the filter and secured the wire, then ran it through a test pass. It came good and we finished the paddock that night. The crew did not lose a day, and I made sure to note the filter change so it could be checked again the next morning."

3. How do you use GPS guidance and precision agriculture systems to reduce overlap and keep passes accurate?

Why they ask

This technical question tests your familiarity with tools like John Deere Operations Center and Trimble displays, which are common in broadacre operations.

How to structure your answer

Explain your practical routine: display setup, A-B line, section control, and how you check accuracy. Mention any specific systems you have used.

Example answer

"I start by setting up the display with the right implement width and guidance line for the paddock. I use an A-B line and let the autosteer hold it, but I still watch the screen and the paddock for obstacles. I turn on section control so the boom or seeder shuts off over overlaps and headlands, which saves inputs. I check accuracy by looking at the coverage map and comparing it to the actual pass, and I adjust if the signal drifts. I have used John Deere Operations Center, Trimble GFX and Raven autosteer, so I can pick up most systems quickly."

4. What do you check before operating a machine near other workers or livestock?

Why they ask

This safety question is central to the role, because machinery operators work around people, animals and moving parts every day.

How to structure your answer

Cover isolation, communication, visibility, and emergency stops. Show that you think about others before you move.

Example answer

"I make sure everyone is clear of the machine and that I know where they are before I start. I check mirrors, cameras and blind spots, and I give a shout or radio call before I move off. If livestock are nearby, I slow down and keep the machine between them and the gate, and I avoid sudden noise. I also check that guards and shields are in place and that the emergency stop is working. If I cannot see someone, I stop and wait until I do."

5. You notice a hydraulic leak on the harvester during a busy harvest day. What do you do?

Why they ask

This scenario question assesses judgement under pressure, including when to fix something yourself and when to call for help.

How to structure your answer

Show a judgement under pressure structure: assess risk, isolate, decide, communicate, and follow up. Do not rush into a repair without making the area safe.

Example answer

"I would stop the machine and park it on flat ground, then shut it down and relieve the hydraulic pressure. I would put on gloves and eye protection and check the leak. If it is a loose fitting or a hose I

can replace, and I have the part, I would fix it and top up the oil. If it is a major failure, I would call the farm manager or mechanic and give them the details. I would also tell the crew what is happening so they can plan around the downtime, and I would clean up any spilled oil to avoid a slip hazard."

6. Describe a time you had to adjust your spraying plan because of wind or weather.

Why they ask

This behavioural question checks whether you can make safe, sensible decisions about spray drift and timing, which is a key part of responsible machinery operation.

How to structure your answer

Use a decision-making walk-through: what you saw, what you checked, what you changed, and what happened. You can blend in STAR elements.

Example answer

"One morning the wind picked up more than forecast while I was spraying a paddock next to a sensitive crop. I stopped and checked the weather station and the forecast, and the wind was above the label conditions. I shut off the boom and moved to a paddock further from the boundary. I also reduced the speed and lowered the boom height to reduce drift. I finished the safer paddock and came back to the first one the next morning when the wind was calm. No drift damage occurred, and I logged the change so the manager could see why the plan shifted."