



Ready-Mix vs Bags Crossover

A small footing pours from a handful of bags. A 10x10 slab needs 62 bags and a full afternoon of mixing. Somewhere between those two jobs, ordering a truck stops being overkill and starts being the obvious call.

Every concrete pour needs an order decision before it needs a shovel: bags from the hardware store, or a truck. Get it wrong in one direction and you are hand-mixing 60 bags on a hot day. Get it wrong in the other direction and you paid a minimum-load fee for a truck to deliver less concrete than a single wheelbarrow load.

Two real jobs, two different answers

A small footing pad, 2 feet long, 6-inch square cross-section, is about 0.5 cubic feet of concrete. That is a couple of 80 lb bags, done in twenty minutes with a mixing tub. No engine on this site would ever recommend a truck for that.

A 10x10 slab at 4 inches thick is a different job entirely. That works out to about 1.36 cubic yards with waste. Order that in 80 lb bags and the answer is 62 bags, each one a 80 lb dead lift, hand-mixed a batch at a time across an afternoon. Order the truck instead and it is a single 1.50 cubic yard delivery (rounded to the truck's minimum), poured and finished before lunch.

Where the crossover actually sits

The concrete order engine's own sensitivity read on this comparison: under about 0.35 cubic yards, bags win outright, the minimum-load and short-load fees on a truck make it the expensive option for that little concrete. Over about 1 cubic yard, ready-mix wins clearly on both cost and effort, the bag count gets impractical fast. In between those two points, it is a genuine judgment call that depends on how much you value not spending an afternoon mixing versus the flat delivery fee.

The 10x10 slab in the worked example, at 1.36 cubic yards, sits well past the upper crossover. That is why the engine flags 62 bags as impractical (compliant: false) and recommends the truck without hedging.

It is not just about the money

A ready-mix truck pours the whole slab in one continuous placement, which matters for finish quality. Concrete that sits too long before the next batch joins it can create a cold joint, a visible and structurally weaker seam. Sixty-two bags mixed one at a time in a wheelbarrow, on a hot day,

with a crew trying to keep pace with a slab that is already starting to set at one end, is a real finish-quality risk that a dollar-for-dollar cost comparison does not capture.

Key takeaway. Under about a third of a cubic yard, bags are clearly cheaper. Over about one cubic yard, the truck wins on cost, time, and finish quality. Run your actual volume through the numbers before assuming either answer.

Assumptions

- Ready-mix pricing includes a typical minimum-load and short-load fee below about 1 cubic yard, which is why bags can still win on very small pours even where a truck would be faster.
- Bag mixing time and physical effort are not priced in this comparison, only material cost and bag count.

Sources

- Standard bag yield by mix size (concrete-family yields, 0.6/0.45/0.375/0.30 cu ft per 80/60/50/40 lb bag)

Frequently asked questions

Why do bags ever lose on cost if they are the smaller unit?

Ready-mix is priced per yard with a flat delivery fee, so the fee gets diluted as volume grows. Bags are priced per bag with no volume discount, so above a certain yardage the bag total simply adds up to more than a truck load, even with the delivery fee included.

Does bag size (40, 50, 60, 80 lb) change the crossover point?

It changes the bag count and the total weight you are lifting, not the crossover volume itself. Smaller bags mean more of them for the same cubic yardage, easier per-lift but more trips to the mixing tub.

What if I am right at the crossover, is there a tiebreaker?

Crew size and schedule usually decide it. One person alone leans toward the truck sooner, since 40-60 bags solo is a long day. A crew of three or four can absorb more bags before the truck becomes the clear win.

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