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WISCONSIN BANKERS' FARM BULLETIN

Ways To Solve The Farm Labor Problem

By

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WHO DOES THE WORK ON WISCONSIN FARMS?

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Wisconsin Bankers' Association

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West Salem

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Pabst Building, Milwaukee

Ways to Solve the Farm Labor Problem

There is one sort of farmer, and he is still fairly numerous in Wisconsin, who doesn't have to worry about the labor problem—he is the farmer who **raises his own help**. Four-fifths of all the farm work in Wisconsin is done by the farmer himself and his family. Only one man in five working on Wisconsin farms is a hired hand from outside the family. The reason why this is so is that Wisconsin farms are small, averaging only 119 acres each. The Wisconsin farmer has a small farm, but he keeps a lot of cows, which his boys can help milk night and morning before and after school.

The kind of farm that is found oftenest in Wisconsin, that pays best on the average, is the **family farm**, the farm big enough to give a family of four, five or six sons and daughters a good living, send them all to school, and then start them all out in life for themselves.

MAY HAVE TO BORROW NEIGHBOR'S SON.

But how about the farmer whose sons are not yet big enough to help, or whose sons have grown up and followed the mad rush to the city, or who has more acres than he has sons enough to handle? Reminding such a farmer that only one part in five of all the farm work is done by hired men doesn't help in the least. His problem is a real one, and it requires a solution, because for one reason or another we shall always have farmers in such circumstances.

In times past such farmers have usually been able to enlarge the family labor force by taking into the household a son of a neighboring farmer who has more sons than he has land to work. Or they may have taken "newcomers" from some of the European countries into the household. There used to be married men, usually foreign-born, who became hired laborers and lived in cottages near the farm house. But the neighboring farmer who has more sons than land to work has almost passed away in many localities. The sons are not being born today as rapidly as they were, and of those who are, the city is getting far more than a fair share. The immigrant of today is not looking for farm work.

Many of these farm cottages stand empty and forsaken. The farmer of today is having to depend increasingly upon wanderers, recruits from the city, and other workmen who are only waiting their first chance to get some other kind of work. What is to be done?

SOME THINGS WHICH CAN BE DONE.

Obviously there are about three possible answers: (1) Replenish the supply. (2) Make better use of what labor is to be had, by better management, or using more machinery. (3) Reduce the size of the farm, or shift the type of farming to one taking less labor. The first two of these are the most important; the third is the last resort.

How is the labor supply to be replenished? Raising more sons would help greatly, of course. But probably enough sons are being born now if only a few more of them would stay on the land. What can be done to make them stay? Most important of all is to give a good man a chance to rise. It is just because the door of opportunity has seemed to be wider open in the city that so many of the sons have left. It is true even today, however, that the young man on the farm is getting ahead faster than the factory worker, for the simple reason that he is able to save two-thirds or three-fourths of his wages, while the city worker lives from hand to mouth, always only a month or two ahead of starvation. With this chance to save, the thrifty farm wage-earner can hope in a few years to become a tenant and in time own a farm. But land has gone sky-high, much higher than wages, and it takes a large pile of money to be even a tenant today, so that too many sons have lost heart or never even started. Now many farmers of today are realizing this and are trying out new kinds of bargains with a good man when they find him. There are many other ways still to be thought out and tried. The farmer who is able to keep a good man until he is ready to become a farmer himself has solved this part of the problem.

Better wages is always a stimulus which is effective in holding men in any employment. The danger is that with rising prices farmers will adhere to customary wage rates until the young men have all gone beyond their reach. The quickest way for a farmer to reconcile himself to higher wages is to note what change has taken place in the prices of his products and then calculate how much he can raise wages without its taking any more milk, pork, or grain than formerly to pay the wages.

MAKE FARM LIFE PLEASANT.

A young man, however, is sure to consider other things than his opportunities for advancement and his pay checks. The farm in the past has offered too few of the pleasures of life to farmer

and farm-hand alike. All that the farm hand expects is that as a member of the household, he shall share equally in its comforts and sociabilities; then as farm living improves, his living will improve also. When the time comes when farm homes everywhere are supplied with reading matter, warm living rooms and baths, and companionship is never more than a half an hour away, then the city will have nothing better to offer in the way of living than the farm.

Better treatment of hired help would also help in many cases. The scarcity of labor has come first on the farm, and the result is that the farm laborer has become independent—he has become independent in many cases before he has become intelligent enough to use his independence properly. Nevertheless there are some farmers who seem to have little trouble with losing their hands when they need them most, and the reason usually is that these men are tactful, and above all, respectful of the personalities of their workmen, so that at all times, they have their esteem and hearty co-operation. The right sort of a hired man always wants to take an interest in the farm work, and his employer should give him a chance to learn all he can about farming. The working day has got to be shortened in some way also; but every good farm hand will understand that there will be times when all rules as to hours must be broken.

HIRE BY THE YEAR.

Still another thing that will keep more men on the farm is year-around employment. Farmers will have to organize their crops and livestock so as to be able to hire a man by the year. No good farm hand wants to loaf all winter, or hunt a job in town.

If a farmer cannot get help in the ways indicated, he will have to manage with less help, either by getting more machinery, a milking machine, perhaps—or by raising such crops as he can handle. Planning his crops and his work so that too many things do not have to be tended to all at once will help a great deal. Winter dairying evens out the load of work in many ways.