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ABOUT THE FARM - - -

By John J. Inskeep, County Agent

County Estimates Reach New High For Preliminary Gross Farm Income

Preliminary gross farm income estimates for Clackamas County reached a new high of \$27,538,000 in 1953, well above published 1951 and 1952 figures. In retrospect, it appears that preliminary estimates for the two seasons prior to 1953 were too low. Actually, a check with rural bank managers indicates a rather stable situation over the past two years with higher total deposits in 1953 over 1952 and a very good loan situation.

As rural people well know, there have been some dark spots on the 1953 farm picture with actual financial hardships by many. Nevertheless, most of those close to the situation believe that the agriculture of our county is a very healthy condition.

Gross Figure

It must be kept in mind that the gross figure of \$27,538,000 is just that—a gross figure. It is possible to have a high gross with unsatisfactory net incomes. On the other hand, it is impossible to have a satisfactory net income situation with present-day high costs, including ever rising local taxes, without a high gross income.

Grassland Program

Several factors are responsible

for this rather unexpected situation. The latter reflects use of better farming techniques, better crop yields and flexibility of production in a highly diversified agriculture. Our farmers rolled with the blow of decreasing prices which appeared two years ago, and came up with a switch to the better paying products. In fact, the agriculture of this county is in a state of constant adjustment for the better. It started with the grassland program initiated fifteen years ago.

Picture Brighter

Not only is the income brighter than was the case in the twenties and thirties when \$6,500,000 was considered a good total, but, along with the improvement in income, we have witnessed a tremendous improvement in soil conservation practices. This fact was evidenced during the early Dec. rains when our smaller streams throughout the country ran clear and fresh. Soil erosion here reached its peak in the mid-thirties. At that time, similar downpours resulted in silt-laden streams carrying precious soil from our then not too productive fields to the ocean.

Fields in Grass

Most of these same fields are now covered with grass. Some

of them have lately been put to the plow. Their owners are capitalizing on stored up fertility. Resulting humus deters erosion for a few seasons during which they yield bountiful crops of berries, vegetables and cereals. Eventually they will be back to grass for profitable production of pasture, harvested forage, or seed.

Satisfactory Crops

The place of this intelligent conservation program has played no small part in this season's satisfactory yields of the previously mentioned crops. Fields which, before the grassland era, produced 15 bushels per acre, now commonly produce 75 to 100 bushels. In some cases, potential yields are even higher, but present-day harvesting equipment is not designed to harvest such enormous yields without considerable waste. Excessive lodging also plays an important part in harvesting loss. We need cereal varieties with shorter, stiffer straw. Their creation presents a challenge to experiment stations. Several are now under test on the Red Soils Experimental area.

Production from our hill lands is especially gratifying considering the fact that land classification experts place them well at the bottom of the capability list.

Costs Remain High

Certain production costs remain to harass hard-pressed producers. Some are stationary and some, feeds in particular, have decreased. Local taxes are on the increase and the same is true of farm machinery and other manufactured articles necessary to the operation of the modern farm business remain high. So are fertilizers and so is farm labor. Prices of certain

farm products are lower. But prices have offset this by higher crop yields based on better production methods and a season of adequate moisture when most needed. We may not be so fortunate in the season to come.

Seasonal Losses

Of the total 1953 farm income, 40.8 percent, or \$11,266,000, was derived from the sale of animal products including meat products, wool, milk, chickens, and turkeys. Many beef producers suffered severe seasonal losses due to lower prices of animals sold and a decrease in inventory values. Many of our Clackamas County producers, however, expected the decline. Their holdings represented breeding cows and their increase, purchased and raised at prices low enough to withstand the blow. Many others purchased lower cost feeders this fall and hope to recoup their losses in 1954. Total income from beef was boosted by larger total sales regardless of individual losses.

Sheep Prices

Sheep prices followed the downward trend of beef, but those canny managers who had fat lambs for sale prior to June 15 experienced a good season.

Milk production, it appears, increased about 10 percent. There are few new Grade A herds and former operators adjusted the number of cattle slightly upward where farm-produced feed and available barn room justified an increase. The small dairy herd producing factory milk has largely been replaced by beef cattle. These days the dairy operator has to be in the business on a large scale or not at all.

Egg Producers

Egg producers have enjoyed

Continued On Page 6



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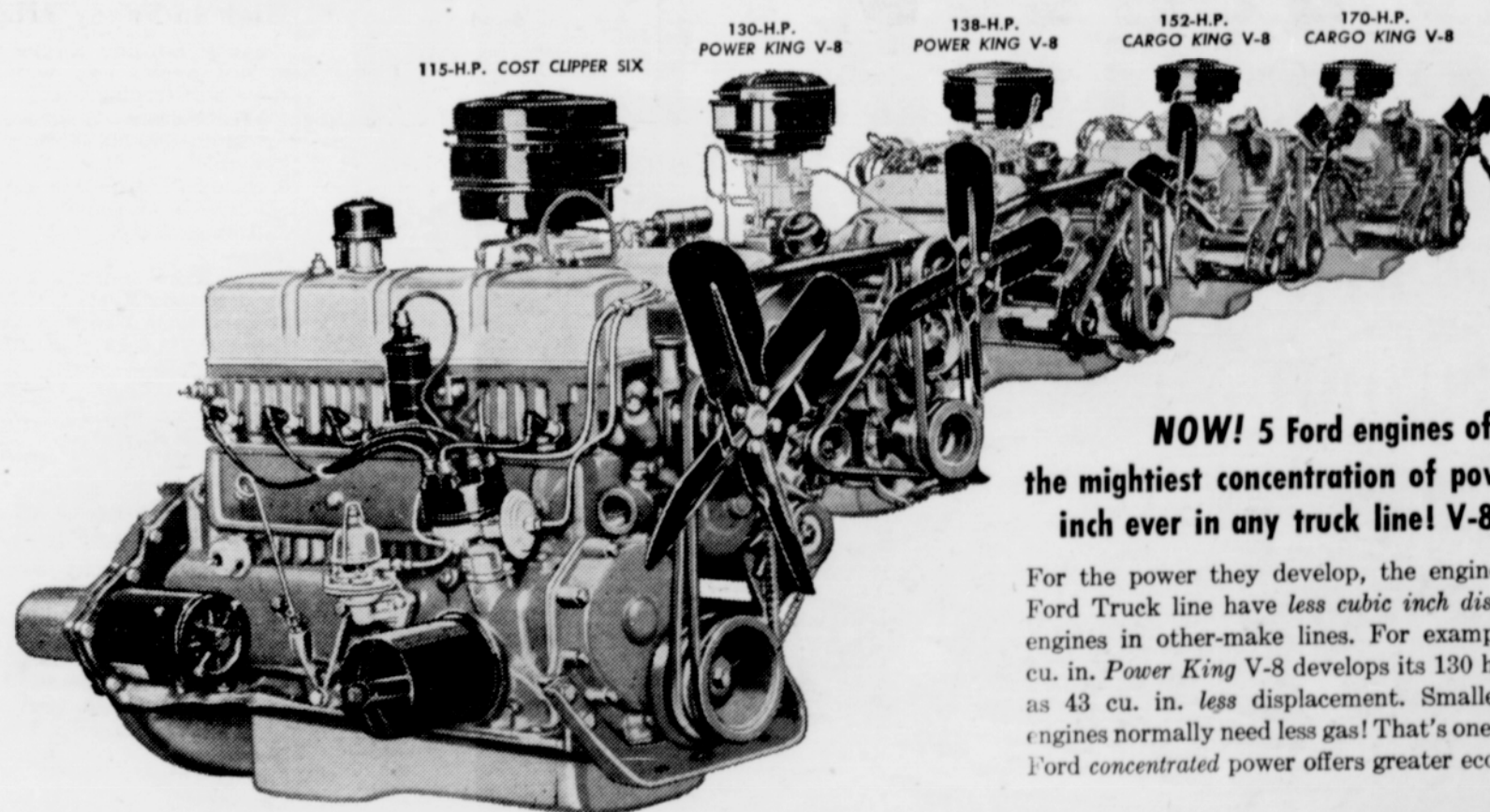
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