

Farmer Views Farm Management

By O. Hull.

I HAVE given myself as much latitude as possible in this title, so that I may say what I please, without being accused of being off my subject. Farm management is such a large subject that I can only cover a small part of the field in the time allotted me. What I shall say is largely gleaned from 45 years of actual experience on the farm, and my somewhat extensive acquaintance with farmers and farm methods, obtained in doing farmers' institute work in my own and several other states in the past 11 or 12 years.

I believe first of all the farmer should, if possible, know the cost of everything produced on the farm. In counting this cost, we are not apt to count our own labor, or that of the family, or board, or the depreciation on horses and machinery, or interest on our investment.

If the general gain does not exceed the cost of production, all these considered, then he should try to determine wherein the difficulty lies. This will necessitate keeping a record of his farm operations; for unless he has some record, he has no way of knowing which of his enterprises are failures or which are making him money.

He is quite likely to attribute success or failure to the wrong cause. This is to be expected since there are so many factors that go to make up success or failure.

Ignorance of Finance.

In talking with a large number of farmers in regard to the most profitable crops to be raised on the farm, I have found but few who have any idea of the cost of growing the crops they are growing every year; and when told of some of the things found out by the farm management department of our state colleges of agriculture, they are ready to discredit the findings. In order to determine for themselves if possible, just what crops were paying, a number of farmers with whom I am acquainted, made up their minds it would be a good thing for them to study their farms from a business standpoint. They instituted a system of bookkeeping which had as its object the determination of the departments on their farms that were producing them the most money.

These men were all successful farmers, and regarded in their respective communities as being progressive and up-to-date. The case of one or two will illustrate: The first was farming well and keeping up the fertility of his soil by growing livestock and rotating crops. He fed cattle and sheep, raised hogs, milked cows, gave some attention to poultry and horses; he grew wild hay, timothy, clover, alfalfa, wheat and oats.

Concentration Best.

It would seem that a man who was growing so many things would succeed, but my farmer friend found when he balanced his books that several departments of his farm were actually losing him money and that there were four principal lines that were making him most; these were hogs, dairy, corn and alfalfa, with winter wheat closely following.

He concluded that if he would make farming a business he should drop the unprofitable lines and devote his time to those that were paying him well. After doing this he found that his yearly profits were doubled, and since he devotes all his time to these few things instead of many, he believes his earnings will still further increase.

Another farmer found he was making more money on what most farmers would call the small things on the farm. His orchard, poultry and garden were yielding him more than the other departments of his farm; so he sold a portion of his land and devoted his time to these things. He is making more money than he was before. This, of course, is partly due to his being, especially fitted for this line of work, and because of his location.

Get Informed.

The farmer who is to be the most successful in the management of his farm should avail himself of all information within his reach; and just here let me say that the farmer of today has many advantages over the farmer of 45 years ago, when I began farming for myself.

Then all questions pertaining to the farm had to be solved in the school of actual experience, and some of the lessons learned were very costly to both the farmer himself and the community in which his work was done. Let the deserted and worn-out farm of the East and Middle West furnish the proof of this.

Many of our farmers do not seem to appreciate the work being done for them by our state and National Departments of Agriculture.

By co-operating with the farm management of these departments the farmer may be materially helped in the management of his own farm, by having solved for him many of the problems, that should he attempt to solve alone, will cost him money and much valuable time.

Value of Facts.

In my own state some very interesting things have been brought to light regarding the cost of growing some of the standard crops. One thing shown was the close relation of the fertility of our soil to the cost of production. For example, land that was only yielding 34 bushels per acre was made to yield 64 bushels per acre, after having been seeded to clover or alfalfa a few years and then plowed up and planted to corn, and this with little or no additional expense per acre; also the yield was increased 11 bushels per acre by the application of barnyard manure.

Facts of this kind should materially aid us in planning our rotation on the farm; being sure to have some legume in the rotation, and instead of selling our grain, and burning our straw and cornstalks, we should feed most of it to stock on the farm and thus get a larger cash return for the present, and a sure return for the future.

The farmer is entitled to a fair rate of interest on his investment, as much as the merchant or the banker, and should receive at least laborer's wages for himself and family. If he is not getting this, he is not getting what belongs to him. Of course, this may not show in money at the end of the year; it may show in better buildings, grain on hand, or an increased number of livestock.

Farm an Investment.

A man should not buy a farm merely to work and earn a living; it ought to be an investment from which he has a right to expect a reasonable return. A careful man should, therefore, not only take an inventory of his property each year but he should keep accounts with every important enterprise on the farm. His books should contain besides the accounts with the persons with whom he deals, accounts with cornfields, oatfields, hayfields, pastures, cattle, hogs, horses, machinery and at least once a year he should balance these accounts and thus determine, not only his loss or gain, but what enterprises have paid best, or which have proven a failure, thus permitting him to plan more wisely for the future.

Another agency that the farmer should reckon with in making his plans on the farm is the agricultural expert or agent. I believe we should encourage the appointment of these agents in every county at least. He, with his expert training, together with the farmer's practical knowledge, will help to solve many problems that confront us on the farm.

Value of Expert.

If there are no other means provided for paying this expert, I believe it would amply repay the farmers to furnish the necessary funds for this purpose.

If the right man is secured for this work, he may not only help us in the management of our farm work, and the breeding and care of livestock, but he may be the means of bringing about a moral and intellectual uplift in the community in which his work is done.

Thus far we have dealt with this subject of farm management largely with a view of securing the largest possible yields. While large yields are certainly very important, maximum yield and the most successful farming do not necessarily go together. The only way the success of the farm can be rightly judged is that of the net income of the whole farm, provided the fertility of the farm has not been impaired.

Farm management considers, among other things, what enterprises shall be undertaken on the farm, how they shall be arranged, and how in detail they shall be conducted in order to fit into this arrangement.

Adapt to Conditions.

The selection of each enterprise will depend on a number of things, such as soil, available labor and markets. It is useless to introduce enterprises on the farm which are not adapted to the conditions existing thereon or where available labor or satisfactory markets cannot be secured.

The agricultural expert with his

knowledge of soils and their adaptability to the growing of certain crops can be of much help here.

The net profit which may be secured from the individual farm, depends very materially on the economic condition of the community in which it is located.

In the minds of all thinking men, there is no longer any question that after the proper adjustment of the enterprises on the farm to enable us to secure the greatest net profit, the next great step in the improvement of the financial condition of the farmers must come by co-operation with each other in working, buying, selling, securing credit, etc. Co-operation has had much to do with the great advancement of the urban people. It cannot fail to have a like effect on the fortunes of the rural people.

Co-operate.

The time has now come when they must adopt it if they wish to secure the maximum of success in their business.

So long as it is true that the farmer gets only from 35 to 40 cents on the dollar the consumer pays for his products, so long will the question of how to get the producer and consumer closer together be an important one to be considered in connection with the business management of the farm.

It will not suffice, however, to confine the attention of farm management to the production of greater net profits from the farm, important as this is.

The development of better rural homes, rural schools, rural churches and all rural institutions that are related to an independent rural citizenship is vastly more important.

If the increased income from the farm does not result in making better farm homes, out of which shall come better boys and better girls who shall be better equipped to fight life's battles than their parents were because of the better advantages they have enjoyed, then, however many dollars you may have on the credit side of your ledger, the final balance sheet will be against you.

Keeping the Boy.

The question of keeping the boy on the farm is sure an important one when we consider that in the stumps of one great city, Chicago, there are 22,000 men and boys who once lived on West and Midwest farms and surely shows that there was something radically wrong with their education and home life.

We must show the boys that farm life is, or can be made, one of the most independent lives that a man can live; that it is an honorable employment; and further, that it is a profitable business when conducted on scientific principles.

It is our mission to feed and clothe the world, and what nobler or higher calling can any man engage in? But while this is true, your boy will as certainly turn from farm life as he will from any other disagreeable work if you keep him at farm drudgery and neglect his education and give him no chance to develop those God-given impulses to rise above the drudgery of life and taste some of the independence, sweetness and beauty that should ever be the crowning glory of life upon the farm.

Possibilities of Farm Life.

Farm life is a life in close communion with Nature; but we must learn some of Nature's secrets, learn to understand her language, and co-operate with her laws to enjoy to the fullest extent this communion and know how to claim from her the rich treasures she holds in store for those who have the key to unlock the door of her storehouse.

The man in possession of this knowledge, and who uses it, not alone to make Nature yield him the largest return in cash, but who succeeds in creating an environment on the farm and in the home that will make his boy and his girl want to dig still deeper into Nature's secrets, has managed his farm to the best advantage, and to the greatest purpose, ever keeping in mind the teaching of the Man of Galilee, that "The life is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment."

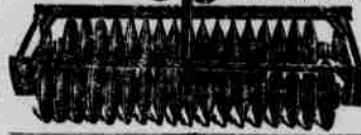
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