

## PRAIRIE PHILOSOPHER SEZ...



*I believe that to live and work on a good farm is pleasing as well as challenging; for I know the joys and discomforts of farm life and hold an inborn fondness for those associations which, even in hours of discouragement, I cannot deny. —Future Farmers of America creed*

**Dragging.** When a field was plowed, it was then ready to be dragged. While that work was always supposed to be done well, it was possible that in some cases it was done too well. Some farmers believed it induced the growth of wild oats and pigeon grass. Others thought dust storms had their beginnings on fields that were over-worked. There were quite a few interesting theories.

Some farmers attached a single drag section to the plow and in that way leveled the plow ridges. Others just tied a horse to the plow, and let it pull a single drag section all day long. However, a few objected to this in that the work was only to be done crosswise.

If a newly seeded flax field was hit by a downpour of rain, the field was dragged so as to break up the hard soil's crust to allow tender flax seeds to push their way up through the ground. Most dragged the corn fields at least two times after it was up in order to kill small weeds and delay cultivating.

I also knew of a few farmers who dragged their grain fields after the crops were up. But I cannot say that that was a general practice. I am here referring to wheat, oats, and barley fields.

A field that was plowed, dragged, and seeded with horses left a checkerboard design of hoof prints on it. And I believe that that was an ideal way to preserve moisture, prevent erosion, and reduce blowing. There were no wheel tracks or wheel compaction.

### **Five different makes of drags used:**

1- The most popular type might have been the five-section wooden drag. It had two right-hand and two left-hand sections and a center or dividing section.

2- A two-, four-, or six-section drag, made of steel. Each section had a set handle so as to set the teeth on upright, slant, or tilt. Each section was heavy weight, and one horse was used for each section.

3- The spring tooth, or steel-bent arch drag, also could be used as two, four or six sections wide. It had a set handle on each drag with which it could be set in and out of the ground. It was also good for making soil rows to hold rainfall.

4- Our all-time favorite drag was also our last horse-drawn drag. It was a six-section flexible steel drag. With it we did the most desirable and trouble-free work of them all. I continued to farm with my horses until October 1979.

**About the management of drags** (to be sure, some people only called a drag a harrow).

No grease was used on drags. Horses pulled them on eveners only. It was a must if one field was finished that the drags, beam, and eveners had to be dismantled and then loaded in a half-box wagon and moved to the next field, unloaded, and again set up for the next or new field...

Drags could not be pulled over solid ground, and in most cases were too wide to clear gates if any were encountered...

We used factory-made carts on all our drag beams to allow the driver to ride. Some readers will recall that some farmers were compelled to line-drive the horses and walk behind the machine all day long. When a cart was used, line extensions were needed on most hitches.

In the event that someone may ask, why I mentioned two, four, or six horses as listed above, well, some people could only afford two or four drags. Also, maybe they could only spare two or four horses for the work. Present-day readers must always bear in mind that in the beginning some people could only hope to seed a small field.

Yes, there really was the opinion voiced that if the horses could pull the drag, the man driving them should be able to walk along behind them for eight or ten hours. And then he should do all the other chores, and maybe even walk to the field a mile or so four times each day. And how about the drag cart? It costs money to buy one. Besides, it simply made the drag harder to pull. If a man was seen seated on one of those and was noticed to throw rocks at the horses, he was not looked upon with much favor in church the next Sunday. Also, a date with a favorite neighbor girl might have been cancelled.

At the season's end, the drags were set up teepee style. The main beam and the eveners were stored indoors until the next season's use. Why did we have so many drags? It was to allow for a drag on each side of the railroad tracks, and also on each side of the county roads where we had fields to seed.

**Seeding.** When a field was plowed and dragged, it was then ready to be seeded. One of the most popular seeding machines or grain drills ever was the Van Brunt. In my time, we used a Case and a Minneapolis Moline drill. All of those were 10 feet wide, had two set handles, and were pulled by four horses. It had two poles with a center crosspiece. The eveners were attached to a follow-up chain that was pulled over two or four pullies. The driver would stand on two walking boards and use two lines.

It was the aim of each farmer to drive in a straight line and to avoid any possible slips. The cleaned and treated seed was stationed at the field ends in a wagon box. Drills required a good oil and grease job every so often. At the season's end, the drills were stored under an A-shaped hutch to give it some shelter. The seed sprouts themselves were taken off and placed in the then empty seed boxes.

**Seed Cleaning.** In late winter or early spring, a Deering-Weber Hero No. 1 fanning mill was set up for seed cleaning. One man would crank it and one would shovel seed in the box and then shovel the cleaned seed away. The off-fall of this was called screening. It could be used as poultry or livestock feed. The mill came with a number of scives and had set patents to allow for the amount of fan air needed. In fact, it was a shacking and air blowing device. Some farmers preferred to clean all of their market wheat so as to salvage the screening for feed.

During the years of World War II, we found it necessary to use one drill. But we wanted it to roll from 7 a.m. until as late into the night as we could see. We did not stop for dinner or supper, and only took as little time to grease or oil the drill or fill seed as needed. But we still lived well. We changed horses three times per day, and men or drivers twice. The first team would walk from 7 a.m. until about 11 a.m. Then the second team would walk until 4 p.m., and the last one on into the night time. We worked together as a family and all seemed to turn out real fine. As you well know, just nobody cares how much money a farmer makes. □