

A Possible Use for North Dakota Straw

by

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A number of mills operating in the middle west manufacture straw board which is used chiefly for making shipping cartons. Their principal source of raw material is grain straw. However, all of these mills have a problem of collecting the straw. The increased use of combines in some areas has added to the problem. Combined straw is left in the field and is difficult to collect. Combines cut the straw high off the ground so that the best straw is left standing as stubble. Some of the straw manufacturers feel that if the problem of collecting straw is not solved, many of the mills will have to shut down for a lack of raw material.

One manufacturer has pointed out that straw is an ideal material for making paper and that for every ton of paper produced there is a saving of an equal amount of wood pulp. Our wood supplies are limited. The large straw mills use about 50,000 tons of straw annually.

A ten year average for North Dakota shows the following grain acreages: Wheat 7,400,000, Oats 1,472,000, Barley 1,527,000, Rye 720,000, a total of 11,119,000 acres of grain. If we assume a straw yield of $\frac{1}{2}$ ton per acre then the straw production for North Dakota is 5,559,500 tons annually. Estimates indicate that about one third of the total grain acreage is still being cut with binders or about 1,850,000 tons of straw are going into straw piles each year. This would indicate that we have plenty of straw to supply several mills and would have enough left for domestic uses.

The collection of straw would still be a problem. The mills would have to be located near the centers of straw production in the state. The price would have to be sufficient to pay the farmer for the extra work of properly handling and baling the straw.

Combine owners might be interested in cutting closer to the ground thereby getting the good straw, and putting a baling attachment on their combines. Bales can be loaded on to trucks with mechanical loaders. A fairly good market value for baled straw should make this financially possible and would give North Dakota another industry.

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The National Institute of Agricultural Engineering accompanied their request with two splendid bulletins, one on "The Farm Tractor" and one on "Tractor Ploughing." Both are beautifully illustrated. The 1944 bulletin on "Tractor Ploughing" has been called "A Ploughman's Bible." (H.L.W.)