

The American Farmer

Way of Life or a Business?

(Editor's note: This is the third in a series of articles on the American farmer. The series is furnished courtesy of DEKALB AgResearch, Inc., in an effort to increase public understanding of this important industry.)

Who is this man — the American Farmer?

The vast majority of farms in the United States are family owned or operated. The primary business of these owners and operators is farming, although some supplement their farm income by off-farm employment.

Perhaps the term "family farmer" is misleading. Mention the words to many, and minds immediately dart back to "the good old days." They conjure up thoughts of a small farm being operated by a self-sufficient and independent family.

But the 1973 version of the family farmer isn't like that. He's not self-sufficient, and he knows it.

He has organized his farm as a business enterprise, and he operates it to achieve a profit. He provides most of the management and capital and he assumes all of the financial risk.

Along with his family, he performs most of the labor. He might hire extra labor, but

usually only during peak work periods.

He may own his land or he may rent it. He may be the sole operator, or he and his son might have a partnership established. He sometimes incorporates his operation — for tax or inheritance purposes — with his wife and children serving as officers in the corporation.

He's willing to go into debt and funds, in fact, that he must rely on credit to keep his operation competitive and efficient enough to support an acceptable standard of living.

Unlike farmers of past generations, he's not suspicious of new ways and new technology. He believes in agricultural research and he's quick to put it to work on his farm.

He's not a "hayseed." He may dress differently or drive his truck more often than his car, but he knows the world. His areas of knowledge range from ecology to economics.

During the past three decades, he's seen more than half of his neighbors leave their farms and seek other employment. They did this, not always by choice, but because the rules of our economy demand efficiency. He is the man who made it this far — the "fit-

test" survivor of the unrelenting economic pressures of our freely-competitive society.

Some express concern that agriculture is under the control of large corporate farms. Of the 2.9 million farms in the United States, less than 0.1 percent of them are owned or operated by corporations with ten or more shareholders, and they account for less than three percent of total farm sales.

Several corporations have entered farming, many of them to their own regret. The results have been nothing short of financial disasters. FARM JOURNAL recently analyzed these corporate flops and cited the major reason for their failures: "Financially oriented brass didn't really understand farming."

FARM JOURNAL found another difference between the corporate farmer and the family farmer — thriftiness! "The front-line manager farmed strictly first class, figuring he had plenty of money to spend because the outfit was big." One of the family farmer's biggest assets is his ability to watch his dollars carefully and invest them wisely, because he's never known it any other way.

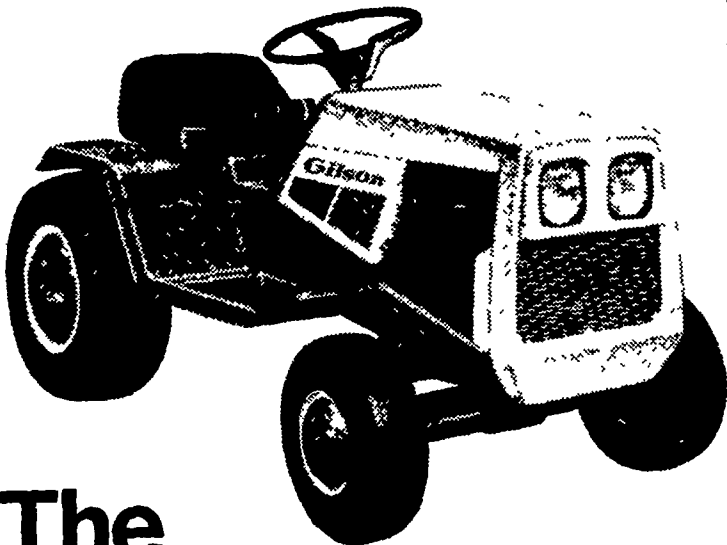
Corporate farmers can't afford to overlook the one factor that makes farming different from other industries. Because they produce commodities and operate under totally free competition, farmers — unlike many businessmen — have never enjoyed the freedom to tack on a suitable margin of profit to the products they sell. In agriculture, the buyer normally commands more power than the seller. The farmer takes what he can get.

You can bet he'll be mighty careful when it comes time for him to buy equipment. And you can bet, too, that he will use it well. When it comes time to plant corn, and bad weather has set him behind, he'll be on the job 24-hours a day. There are no eight-hour days, five-day weeks or overtime paychecks for the farmer.



He may dress differently or drive his truck more often than his car, but the American farmer is a businessman. He's both management and labor. He knows no eight-hour days, five-day weeks or overtime pay. And he can't strike for higher wages.

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