

Shortage

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labor, when it's available, is costly.

Other areas are feeling the pinch, too. Messick said he'd received calls in the past week or so from a pair of New York farmers and one in Virginia who wanted to buy tractors. He just sold a combine to a man from New Jersey.

Asked if parts were a problem, Messick said, "No, but we're just now beginning to see a lot of backorders on our invoices and it seems to be getting worse."

Park Lefever, who bought the L. H. Brubaker, Inc., dealership in Lancaster last August, said parts were getting to be a problem with him, too. In fact, 40 percent of their most recent parts order was put on backorder. Lefever says he could sell more equipment if he could get it from the manufacturers. "New Holland has told us they won't give us any more balers even if we show them signed orders. Allis Chalmers tractors are hard to get, too. Especially the 100- to 150-hp models."

But worse than all that, Lefever said, is the baler twine situation. "Last year, Portuguese sisal twine was \$8 for a 10,000-foot bale," Lefever said. "This year, if we can get it, it'll be selling for \$18 or more. We just got a letter from the manufacturer saying

they're upping our price on a bale by another dollar. The supply of plastic twine isn't quite as tight, but that's running to \$14 to \$16 a bale, too."

Equipment availability is being hurt by a shortage of component parts. Lefever noted that forage boxes he has on order haven't been delivered because the maker can't get the gearboxes they need to complete the wagons.

A lack of component parts is creating a series of bottlenecks in the farm equipment industry, and there doesn't appear to be an easy way out of the situation. "We have machines that are 90 percent complete, but we can't finish them because we don't have flywheels, or knives, or castings," we were told by a spokesman for New Holland.

Thomas Beaver, New Holland's vice-president and general manager for North American operations, said in a prepared statement on the equipment shortage, "Our dealer inventories have been reduced to the lowest level we've seen in many years, and with shortages facing our suppliers - just as they face us - we'll have difficulties meeting demands for equipment."

"We're experiencing some challenges due to a shortage of materials necessary in our manufacturing operations, especially steel, fasteners and castings," Beaver said. "V-belts and knives, important components in hay harvesting equipment, are also in tight supply."

Beaver pointed out that it's impossible to be specific on delivery time of machinery to farmers because of the many uncertainties that can enter into the picture. "The earlier a farmer gets his order in, the better his chance of getting his machine when he needs it," he concluded.

C. B. Hooper, an IH dealer from Intercourse, said his inventory of manure spreaders was

down to five the day we talked to him. Hooper said he tried to get 14 more spreaders, but he just wasn't able to. He said his tractor sales will probably be way down for the coming season, too, simply because he won't be able to get the equipment. "Western farmers are buying everything in sight," Hooper said. "Kansas City is a real hot spot right now, and I understand they've ordered 2500 IH tractors for delivery there next year."

Hay tools and parts supplies are presenting no problems to Hooper at the present. He predicts the used equipment business will "go wild".

"Used equipment is getting harder to find," we were told by Lloyd Wenger, of Wenger Farm Machinery in Myerstown. Wenger specializes in used equipment. He buys some locally, but a lot of the things he sells are picked up on buying expeditions to equipment auctions in the Midwest. "We'd like to get plows, discs and tractors," Wenger said. "When we go out West, we're used to coming back with 20 tractors. Last week we came home with just three."

Short supply and strong demand have driven used equipment prices up terrifically, Wenger commented. "Usually, at this time of the year we're buying more tractors than we're selling. Last week we sold 22 tractors and bought eight. Last year at this time we had over 200 farm tractors and now we have half that. My advice to any farmer who's in the market for equipment is to buy as soon as he can, because availability is going to get worse."

Equipment shortages are nothing new to horse farmers, according to Arthur Good from A.B.C. Groff in New Holland. "They don't make any more horse drawn disc harrows," Groff said, "and there's hardly anything else made, either, for horses. Our customers have been

adapting smaller tractor-drawn implements and fixing up their old things, but it's getting worse for them all the time."

Good noted that they are getting more advance orders than ever before, and expects that by spring many farmers will find themselves scrounging for equipment. In his opinion, Good says, "Nobody's hurting that badly that they can't get equipment if they want it. And buyers can still afford to be a little bit choosy about the equipment they get."

Gary Shotzberger, of Shotzberger's in Elm, said they'll have tractors in 1974, but 80 percent of the John Deere tractors they're going to get have already been sold. "Our two biggest models are sold out already, and the rest may be sold by January," Shotzberger said. He said they didn't get as many corn planters as they wanted, but so far, their parts situation was looking good.

Frank Mohler told us,

"Everybody is going to have problems because demand is outrunning supply." Mohler is with Adamstown Equipment, Inc. "Our parts department isn't in any trouble. But tractor shipments are slow. Even our consumer products - lawn tractors - are coming in behind schedule."

In Chicago, W. H. Stone, research director for the Farm and Industrial Equipment Institute, said, "Farmers aren't exactly dying for tractors. They bought 195,000 tractors this year, compared to 150,000 last year, which was more like a normal year. But, if a farmer wants to be prudent, he'll get his equipment order in right away. The manufacturers are going to have all winter to play catch-up."

He also echoed the almost unanimous feeling throughout the industry that if a farmer wants a piece of equipment, he'd better place his order early.

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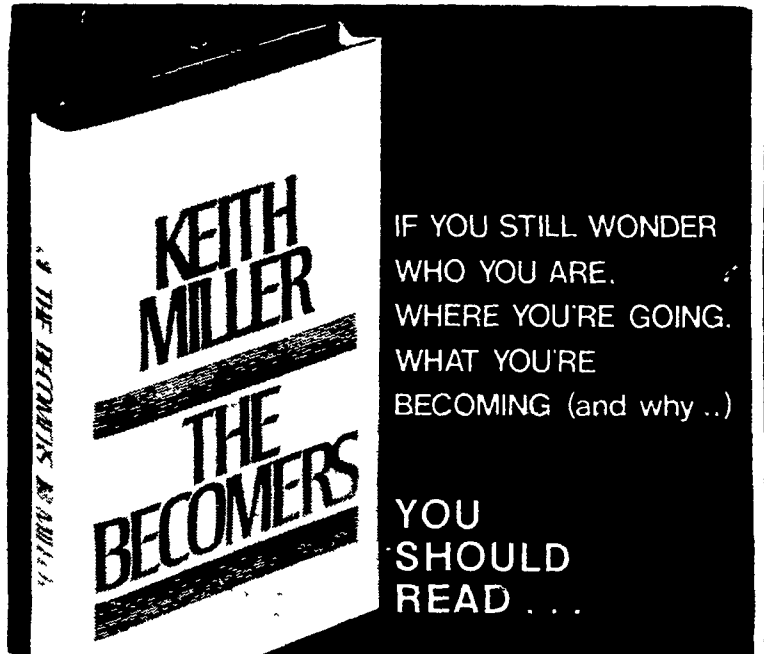
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