

# Farm employment often misunderstood

By JERRY WEBB  
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NEWARK, Del. - There seems to be a paradox in today's farm labor market - farmers who say they can't find good help while there are at the same time good men who say they would like to work on farms.

Perhaps there are many reasons for this. One being the wage rate. Farmers feel they can't pay a man what he could earn on a city job so they're left to pick from the unemployed, the elderly and disabled, and a few qualified men who just won't leave rural America.

For the most part, employers are dissatisfied with the help they can get and yet are unwilling or are unable to pay more for better help. A farmer often must offer a man a wage almost equal to his own earnings - even then the prospect may not take the job.

But listen to a few potential hired men talk and you see there is more than money keeping them off the farm. They don't consider farmers among their favorite bosses. In many instances, farmers prove to be very difficult employers. Either they aren't used to having hired help and don't know how to use it or they've been stung by a bad worker and want to make sure it doesn't happen again.

It stands to reason that the average farmer is probably not the best employer. He's a sort of "one man band" who does everything around the farm. No one else can do as much work, fix as many things or operate expensive machines as carefully. Few hired workers measure up regardless of pay rate to the operator in skill, hustle, dedication and farm savvy.

Take the \$5 per hour factory worker and put him on a farm and odds are he'll not work out. On his job, he's expected to do one thing. He can be trained in a day or two, he makes very few decisions, is protected from abuse by union rules, isn't asked to work in rain or bitter cold and doesn't have to worry about emergencies such as loose livestock, a broken irrigation pump, or a hay baler that won't tie. The factory worker is supported by a battery of experts who fix things that are broken, soothe his jangled nerves when he gets upset and keep his simple job running smoothly.

Compare that with the farm worker who's expected to know fully as much as the boss about everything on the farm. It's not enough for the hired hand to know what he would do in every situation, he must also know what the boss would do. If he guesses wrong, he's in trouble.

In short, to be a good hired man he has to be about as good at farming as the farmer himself. What other career choice demands so much at the starting level? Any man who meets the demands deserves more than the usual

farm worker package of so much a month, a house, a place to have a garden and one hog per year.

Maybe there is no answer to the farm labor problem. Obviously a farmer can't pay more than he earns to a hired man. Nor should he be expected to provide him with a better home than his own. If the employer is scraping to make ends meet, as so many farmers are, it's bound to be hard on the hired help. And maybe farmers in this situation should not expect to be employers.

On the other hand, the farmer who has a fairly large operation and is making money should be able to get the help he needs. I'm convinced that workers are there if farmers can provide the financial base and a reasonable future. A lot of city folk with usable farm skills would still much rather live and work in the country.

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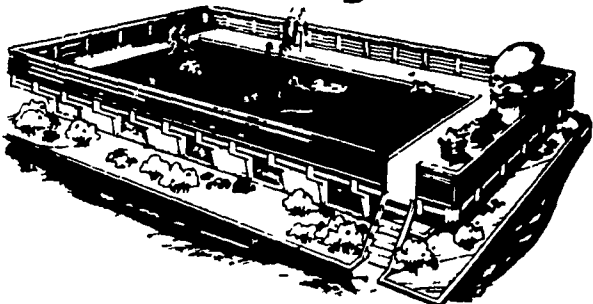
YORK, Pa. - Members of the York County Holstein Association are sprucing up their best animals for competition in the annual County Black and White Show, scheduled for Wednesday, August 17 at the York Fairgrounds, beginning at 10 a.m.

Over 100 animals are entered in the 25 class divisions. Official placings will be made by Lancaster County Holstein breeder Elvin Hess, of Strasburg.

"Highlights of the show will be the selection of grand champion, and the naming of the premier breeder and premier exhibitor banners," noted Ellis Crowl, Airville R2, chairman of the show.

County 4-H dairy project members will sponsor their Summer roundup on Tuesday, August 16, at the fairgrounds. Dairy project owners of Holstein animals are invited to remain at the fairgrounds for the open class show the following day.

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