

U.S. farm mechanization amazes Chinese visitor

HARTLEY, Iowa — Sha Zhifan came all the way from a farm in the People's Republic of China to see how food is grown in America. After working more than a month on Alvin Dykstra's

farm here, Sha's a bit worried. "No people in fields," he said sadly. Back home, Sha was used to seeing flocks of people invade the fields for each

day's work. Without the modern machines and chemicals farmers use in the United States, China needs plenty of people to grow food. Sha, 31, was one year old

when his government came into power. He will work on the farm of his sponsor, Dykstra, until the spring of 1980. Eleven other Chinese farmers will work on other U.S. farms.

In China, Sha specializes in raising hogs but he's keenly interested in everything agricultural.

Here, Sha lives in a tan clapboard house with Dykstra's daughter and son-in-law, Tom and Marcia Aupperlee. The Aupperlees' two preschool boys follow him about much of the time.

He is hard-working, even helps clear the table, do the dishes and vacuum the house. He said in China there's no line between men's and women's work.

Sha can't believe Dykstra and Aupperlee turn out 1,500-2,000 hogs a year, 100 or so sheep, grow 550 acres of corn and soybeans and handle all the other farm chores by themselves. Behind the observation he sadly made in halting English that there are "no people in fields" was an apparent fear the planting wouldn't get done "with just the three of us to do it," Dykstra said with a smile.

"He said he really likes to see a lot of people working in the field," said Marcia. "One day when all four of us were out planting trees, he said 'Ah. Many people in field.' I'm always kidding him about all the people they have in China. But, boy! If we had 20 like Sha, what we couldn't get done.

"From what Sha has told me," Dykstra said, "to handle the production we do would take 120 people in China's labor-intensive farm style. Most would specialize in one area or another of the work. A million dollars invested here in land and farm equipment baffles Sha. He often asks how much things cost.

"Among those 120 people Sha counts would be veterinarians, machinery repairmen and other specialists. We do that work ourselves when we can and hire a vet or some other expert when we can't."

Dykstra said, "He was eager to see how we plant. I think he believed we wouldn't get it done in time.

We had a wet spring and we were late. He wants to see how we harvest and how we weed. His people do much of that by hand. I find they're still planting some types of corn we used in the '30's. He's interested in American seed corn, which he'd heard about. He has a corn harvesting machine on his farm but the corn ears are too close to the ground to fit in the machine.

"He's amazed at the freedom American farmers have to grow what they want," said Dykstra. "In China, Sha's production team leaders make production decisions for him. He has 200 people on his production team, counting the parents' children. He has about 10,000 people in his commune, we think.

"Sha likes working with hogs best at his commune but he's also interested in poultry. He said it takes them two months longer than us to raise a hog for market," Dykstra said, "because their feed lacks the potency ours has. But with their manpower, they keep their pigs cleaner than we do ours. They clean most pens daily and the farrowing pens four times a day. I've seen Sha trying to clean our pens in his free time.

"He's very aware of efficiency. I had to drive to a sale one day to buy calves. It turned out I didn't buy any. Sha told me I wasted gas, lost work time and didn't even buy anything. 'No good,' he said."

Dykstra taught him to operate a tractor. Sha thinks it won't be a useful skill in China, since he won't have one there. "But he hopes his commune will get several soon," Dykstra said. "Sha said a manual auger-type post hole digger he used one day will be most useful."

Sha had an intensive eight-week English language course before coming to America. Since his wife, who stayed behind with their six-month-old son, teaches English, Sha had a head start.

Dykstra said, "While he has trouble understanding — he says we talk too fast — he can write in perfect English any sentence he understands. Sha keeps a little notebook of strange English words, their phonetic spellings and Chinese

translation. Sometimes I can't run a point all the way down. But we'll learn more as his English improves. The Aupperlee boys will learn some Chinese, too.

"Sha has adapted to American food well," said Marcia, who gets insight into that phase of Sha's "Americanization." "He heard about hamburgers in China and likes them a lot. He likes spaghetti, pudding and cold breakfast cereals, which are new to him. He dislikes toast and jello. He salts his bread and butter heavily, even when it's covered with peanut butter and jelly.

"For some reason," she said, "it surprised us to learn they used peanut butter in China."

"He didn't like butter when he first arrived. He doesn't like tea but drinks water, milk and cocoa. His favorite is ice cream. Since the Chinese generally have refrigeration in rural areas, he doesn't get much ice cream back home," she said.

"Sha thinks Americans 'cook quick' but spend a lot of time washing all the dishes it takes us to prepare food. He says in China they often use only a few bowls for a family meal. He says alphabet soup is the funniest thing he's ever seen. He can't believe Americans would bother to put letters in their soup," Marcia said.

"He said he eats a lot of vegetables in China and some pork. Chinese produce a lot of pork but Sha says they need many more hogs," Marcia said.

"By our standards, Sha lives a spartan life. He and his family have only cold water in the few rooms of their home. They share a kitchen. He laughed when I showed him the gadgets in my kitchen and asked if his wife had a blender." His experience with a vacuum cleaner is limited to one he knows of in his part of the commune. Sha told me, "It will be many years before we have auto."

"We pay him a regular salary, which goes to the International Farmers Association for Education. They helped bring Sha over here. They do this with farmers all over the world. They in turn pay him and

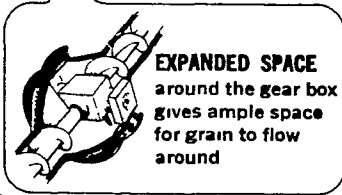
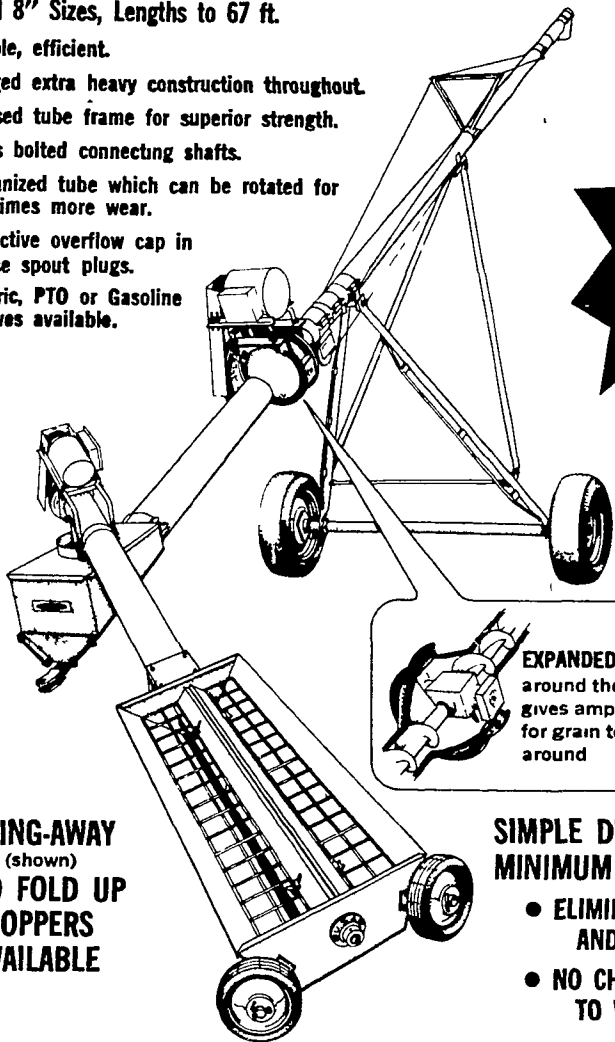
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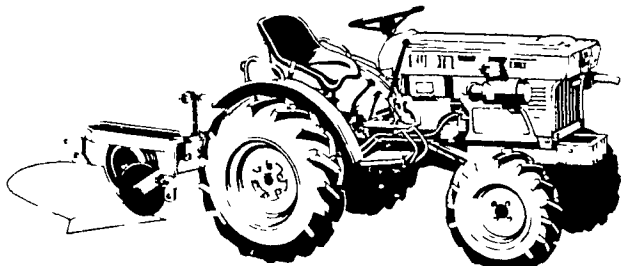
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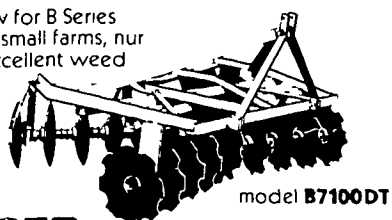


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