

For Elmer Lapp... There's just something about horses

BY JACK HUBLEY

KINZER — Hey, you. You with the two-bottom plow and six-horse team. Did you ever stop to think about how many heads you turn in a day's time?

You don't do things like most people, you know. No 200 horsepower, no front-wheel-assist, and no 12-speed transmission. Just six tons of lathery horseflesh breaking ground the way your grandfather and his grandfather's teams worked the land in ages past.

Tractors are nice, of course, but there's just something about horses.

Which is why Elmer Lapp still does things the time-honored way on his 83 acre farm north of Kinzer in eastern Lancaster County.

Living in the heart of Amish country, Lapp and his purebred Belgian draft horses seem no more out of place than windmills and hex signs. Yet Elmer is a bit different

from his Old Order neighbors, for, although the 65-year-old farmer does own a tractor, he still prefers to follow a team for much of the field work.

"I guess I'm just a stubborn old Dutchman," Lapp chuckles, "but there's life out there in front of you when you're behind a team. That makes all the difference to me."

Elmer cultivated a fascination for farming with horses at an early age. Working the family farm with his father, David Lapp, Elmer was driving a hay loader, complete with a four-head team at the age of seven.

The elder Lapp retired from farming in 1941, and Elmer married during the same year, assuming full farming responsibilities the following spring.

"I bought 24 head of Guernseys, four horses, along with all the necessary equipment, for \$2,000," Lapp reminisces.

Why didn't the young farmer

Time to lunch; time to work



Elmer and company tend to the field work while other members of Lapp's 22-horse family take a break in the pasture. Lapp's youngest son, Elvin, inherited his fathers interest in Belgians and currently owns a number of the horses at the farm.

Only 12 hours old



Elmer Lapp's mare, Queen, proudly displays her new son. Less than 12 hours old, the colt will weigh a ton or more at maturity.

"upgrade" his operation with a tractor?

"Just wasn't interested," Elmer replies. "And I probably wouldn't own one today if it hadn't been for my oldest son, Evan. We bought our first tractor, a second-hand John Deere, in the early 1960's. I use the tractor for the plowing, but all our discing, harrowing and planting, is still done with a team".

Though Lapp maintains that four good horses are capable of handling all the field work on his nearly 60 acres of cropland, the farm is currently home to 22 horses, including 11 breeding mares.

After selling his dairy herd last year, Elmer decided to direct all of his efforts to what has become the profitable business of raising draft horses.

Elmer credits the high cost of tractors and fuel for creating the increase in popularity of draft animals, particularly in the New England states and Canada.

Lapp points out that farmers can grow their own fuel when using horses, and adds that horse-drawn implements and equipment are less expensive than their tractor-drawn equivalents.

Best of all, a team owner can raise his own replacements. Though an average draft mare will cost \$2,000 to \$3,000, her spring fowl can be sold at six months of age for half that amount. And a healthy mare can produce quite a few replacements in her lifetime.

"I have a 20-year-old mare who's

(Turn to Page A24)

Let's go home



After 58 years of farming with horses, Elmer Lapp, of Kinzer, still does half of his field work with a team of his purebred Belgians.

Teamster & team take a rest



"When the horses rest, you rest, too," Elmer advises. "You don't get that opportunity when you drive a tractor."

Ella, Pam, Becky, Nancy



With (from left) Ella, Pam, Becky and Nancy, in harness, Elmer and his team of powerful ladies are ready for an afternoon's discing.