

Farm Talk

by
Jerry Webb

Going to a farm auction

There's something very special about a farm auction. I guess more than anything else it's because it signals the end of something. I've had occasion recently to attend several such auctions. These weren't the forced sales that you hear so much about in the media these days. They just happened to be older farmers who for various reasons, probably including the sad state of the agricultural economy, had chosen 1985 to retire.

And so, they had lined up for all to see their possessions, farm machinery, livestock, crops, furniture, junk, virtually everything but the clothing on their backs and the cars they drive. Then they invited the world, or what seemed like a considerable part of it, to stop by, take a look, bid if they so desired, and maybe take something home.

Nothing draws a crowd like a farm auction. If you get there early, you can find a place within reasonable hunking distance of the sale, but if you arrive late, forget it. You can walk a mile. Depending on what you're there to buy, a late arrival may be the prudent thing

because the auctioneer can go on for hours selling what is loosely labeled as junk—all of those small items that accumulate around a long-time farming operation.

It's funny how the auction format seems to be the same regardless of the auctioneer or the location. The small items are piled on flatbed wagons and sold first. Then to the machinery, usually starting with the tractors and ending up with the combine, if there is one. And finally the livestock and any feed that's on hand.

As the auctioneer mounts the first wagon and details the terms of the sale, the crowd starts to close in making it virtually impossible for all but a few pressed against the wagon bed to see much of anything. Then with the help of a couple of assistants the auctioneer grabs up anything of seeming value and offers it to the highest bidder. Those things that don't attract bidders are piled together and sold as a final "everything that's left on the wagon."

It always impresses me when I attend a farm auction how ex-

ensive farm equipment is when it's purchased new and how inexpensive some of it is a few years later at a farm auction. I'm also impressed by how relatively inexpensively a young farmer can equip himself with the necessary if not the most ideal farm equipment.

I know a new combine sells for more than \$100,000, but at recent farm auctions I've seen ready-to-go used ones sell for under \$20,000 and ones that probably need a good going over before summer harvest sell for under \$10,000.

I've watched strong diesel tractors bring five or six thousand dollars at a farm auction while their new counterparts stand waiting on the dealer's lot with forty and fifty thousand dollar price tags. Granted these older tractors lack heated cabs and air conditioning, but they don't lack horsepower and serviceability.

As I looked at those farm auction equipment inventories, I was also impressed with the amount of equipment some farmers find necessary or desirable. None had less than three tractors, some as many as five or six, and at a couple of those auctions I got the feeling the farm operator was equipping some kind of agricultural ark with two of almost everything mechanical.

There would be two hay balers, two manure spreaders, two springtooth harrows, two corn planters and on down the list.

Almost everything that could be fastened to a farm tractor was represented, usually in pairs, maybe one newer than the other or larger, but nonetheless duplicated by another piece of equipment. Every tractor ever owned was there from the first little Ford or Farmall H bought in the late 30s to the newest International, John Deere, or White. There was even some horse-drawn equipment at a couple of those sales.

There's one thing about an auction—it's a way of getting rid of whatever is for sale. If the auctioneer finds something that seems to have no value, he puts it with something that does, and together they find a home. And so by the end of a long day, everything has been sold, and a day or so later it's all been hauled away.

It must be a very emotional time for those retiring farmers watching their farm machinery and livestock loaded onto someone else's truck and leaving the farm for the last time. No doubt some of those farmers looked forward to that day when they could sell out, cash in and find a well-earned retirement.

Watching one old dairy farmer who I would have guessed to be 75, I had the feeling that he didn't really want to give up. He seemed to have a well-run, solid little dairy

farm that would support a family, but he was just too old to continue. He could no longer meet the rigors of twice-a-day milking and a full schedule of field work. Probably his health was failing; I couldn't tell, but for whatever reason, he was selling out.

It was all there in the morning sunshine for his neighbors and everyone else to see. It was piled in a circle around his house and stretched on either side of the lane toward the highway, an accumulation of a half century of farming and living. It was sold to friends and strangers for whatever it would bring. And by the end of the day most of it was already loaded and on its way to some new use.

When I returned a few days later to pick up my purchase, a new man was already occupying the place—a young dairyman who was obvious during the auction carefully buying the things he thought he needed to get started.

So farm auctions are held and farmers come and go, but farming continues. The equipment may change hands and different people may be doing the work, but the land is still farmed. That's something to think about when you consider the current farm crisis and our long-term continuing need for food.

DOWN TIME CUTS PROFIT!



FAST SERVICE IS THE ANSWER!

Tam Systems offers fast, expert service backed by more than 11 years experience. Call us when any part of your feed or grain handling system is down. In minutes, the answer to your problem will be on its way... day or night!



PHONE
717-432-9738

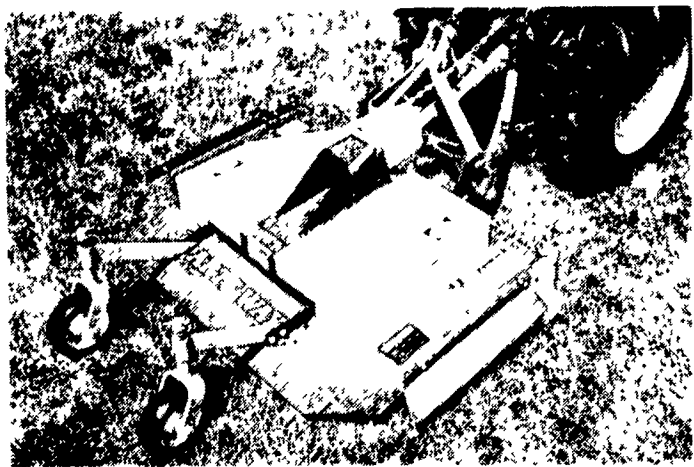
RD 1 MOUNTAIN ROAD DILLSBURG, PA. 17019



ARTS-WAY

REAR-MOUNTS

Featuring gear-box drive for better power economy and quieter operation



Our low-profile gear box is positioned up front on the mower deck for closer, more level alignment between mower and tractor PTO for reduced shaft flexing, vibration and U-joint angling. You get more efficient transfer of PTO power to the mower for better fuel economy, quieter operation and longer life.

Other outstanding Arts-Way features include — ■ High-suction blades for cleaner cutting ■ Anti-windrow design ■ No-twist belt patterns ■ One-Year Limited Warranty.

MODELS AVAILABLE w/CUTTING WIDTHS FROM 48" to 90"

COME IN TODAY FOR A DEMONSTRATION

AREA REPRESENTATIVE: MILTON R. ANDERSON, INC.
P O Box 6126, Harrisburg, PA 17112
(717) 652-6043 or (800) 543-3000, Ext 2002

RISING SUN, MD
Ben Haines
301-658-5359

ROME, PA
Histsands Farm
Centers
717 744-2371

WAYNESBORO, PA
B Equipment, Inc
717-762-3193

LEBANON, PA
Evergreen Tractor Co
Inc
717-272 4641

GREENWOOD, DE
Delridge Supply, Inc
302 349-4327