

# Farm Talk

By  
**Jerry Webb**

## Hooked on machinery?

There seems to be general agreement that a lot of farmers are in trouble these days because of oversized machinery investments. They got hooked on farm machinery at a time when it was buy equipment or pay taxes. And they liked equipment.

So they bought and bought and bought beyond the real needs of their farming operations. Then when the economic good times went away, they were stuck not only with a lot of expensive, depreciating implements but also with a mind set that insisted that those machines were necessary just to survive in farming.

There are all sorts of horror stories about farmers being forced to sell out due to the faltering economy. But I've attended some of those farm sales recently and I wonder why some of those farmers weren't buried a lot sooner under the weight of their machinery inventory.

Eight or nine tractors regardless of the vintage is too many for almost any farmer. I attended a sale the other day where a fellow

was scaling back — not really getting out of farming, just changing from heavy crops production into more livestock. He sold fifteen tractors.

Granted some were old and not of great value but their combined selling price even in today's depressed agricultural economy approached \$25,000.

There's also the true story of a farmer who is having to give up his second combine. He's leasing it at a monthly cost of \$1,800 and he's finding the payments a little hard to make. So he's going to scale back to one combine and save the difference. Relief from that monthly payment will go a long way toward saving a faltering operation.

Farmers haven't always been that machinery-oriented. In fact, if you look back in agricultural history you will find a resistance to the new labor saving machines of the early 1800's.

Cyrus McCormick and those other inventors who brought horse drawn mechanization to agriculture in the early 1800's met

with great resistance. In fact, it took the Civil War and the accompanying manpower shortage to force farmers to purchase such labor saving machines as grain binders, planters and mowing machines.

Even as recently as the 1930s a farmer could get a start with only a team of mules, a wagon and a few simple-horse drawn implements. Glen Hawkins was that kind of farmer. He was a young share cropper in 1931 when he came to take over the farming chores for my aging grandfather.

He came with the bare essentials — a team of horses, a plow, a harrow, a wagon, a corn planter and a good wife. They farmed 120 acres with that inventory — long hours, hard work and some work swapping with neighbors.

Glen's cousins share cropped an adjoining farm and they had a threshing machine and some other essential tools that Glen lacked. And so he traded his strong back for the use of some of their more sophisticated machinery.

Glen had a dream. He wanted to own his own farm and so he worked day and night through the worst farming period in American history. He saved his money.

He bought an old Farmall F30 tractor and a two-bottom plow. Then a grain drill, cultivators for the tractor and a few other implements. And he continued to save his money. Twelve years of farming that Missouri Ozarks farm and he made a down payment on the place next door.

He went on to be a successful and respected farmer in the community — farming in that same hard working conservative way until health and urban pressures made it prudent for him to slow down.

I visited him last year and we reminisced about those good old days when he was a struggling

share-cropper and I was a little kid following along, begging for a ride on the tractor. He remembered the humble beginning and he sympathized with today's farmers who are in financial trouble.

And speaking from 85 years of accumulated wisdom that included starting with nothing and winding up well fixed, Glen suggested that too many of today's farmers have been seduced by the need for expensive equipment.

There's a lot to be said for having the right machine at the right time. For being able to go to the field with 2 or 3 rigs and all of the necessary support equipment.

But for many farmers the time has come for taking a hard look at a farming situation and deciding on a survival tactic.

How much land can one man

farm with one good tractor and a few supporting implements? I think a lot of farmers would be surprised at the answer

I'm reminded of a farmer I know who sold out about a year ago. He kept one decent old tractor and then purchased a used no-till planter. By the time the ground warmed up he was right back in farming. A lot better off financially from having sold 7 or 8 tractors, a combine, a full line of equipment and a lot extra. And he was still farming several hundred acres.

No doubt his cost for custom operators increased dramatically but I'll bet he showed a profit. And that's more than a lot of full-time farmers were able to do.

Some farmers tell me they would rather not farm than farm that way. That might be their choice.

## Vicon salesman wins trip



Vicon territory manager Boyd Moody and Mrs. Moody of Williamsburg, PA, stand beside a new Vicon 321 mower/conditioner while on a trip to Holland last month. They visited the RAI International Farm Machinery show in Amsterdam, The Netherlands, one of the largest farm machinery shows in the world. The trip included a visit to Vicon headquarters in Nieuw Vennepe, Holland, plus visits to all parts of that country. Vicon manufactures a complete line of hay-making equipment and fertilizer spreaders.

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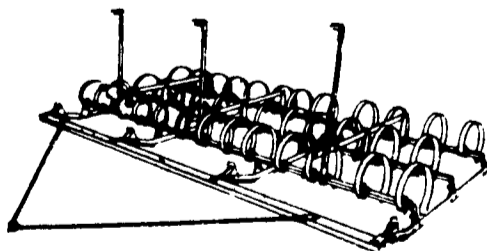
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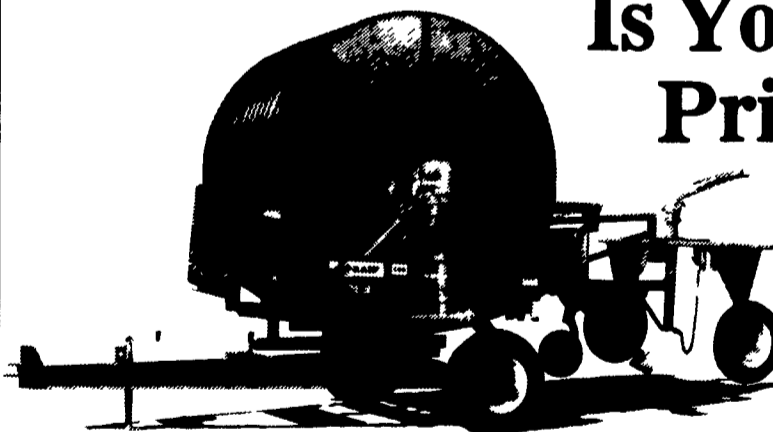
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