

Care and Protection of Farm Equipment

By M. R. D. OWINGS

SINCE the arrival of dollar wheat, and fifty cent oats, editors, college professors and economists have taken a great deal of pleasure in speaking of the present day farmer as a "business man." They do not always define the term and on close scrutiny it looks as if the so-called "business" farmer was sometimes such largely because high prices of his products had made him prosperous, rather than because of his adoption of more businesslike methods.

It has been well demonstrated that a real business man is successful as a manufacturer in so far as he is able to make mechanical labor take the place of less productive hand labor, and that a real business man as a farmer is similarly successful in so far as he can do the same thing. But here, very often, is where the resemblance ceases.

The manufacturer invests so much money in labor-saving machinery; he allows so much for depreciation and then proceeds to see that his machine is well housed, well cared for and kept going. He figures that it must pay so much interest on the original investment, plus a profit sufficiently large to equal, ultimately, the original investment. The longer the machine can fulfill the duties for which it was intended, the greater the money returns on the first outlay.

Farmers' Methods

When a farmer figures on the same basis in caring for his equipment, the economic term of "business man" fits him and generally you can call him an automobile owner as well. But when he invests his capital in expensive machines—and many of them—such as a modern farm nowadays necessitates, and then leaves his plow in the fence corner and his binder in the field and his new wagon under the eaves of his cow shed, he falls short of exercising the right kind of business methods. Perhaps he makes enough to be able to do all this without noticing the drain upon his gross income. Some farmers figure that way but it is not good commercial doctrine.

The money which a farmer puts into a binder, mower or manure spreader, is just as much capital invested as the money another man puts into a machine for making shoes or spinning cotton. It deserves an annual interest and an ultimate profit equally as much, and it is entitled to as thorough care and protection. Furthermore, the laws governing continuity of service apply exactly the same to a cream separator and a wagon as to a planer or grinder. Of course, owing to the seasonal use of farm machines there are lapses of time when certain machines must remain idle. It is at this period when they should be best protected. Scientists say that the muscles of an arm wither quicker from inactivity than from over-activity. The same thing is true of equipment, whether on the farm or in the factory. More plows have been worn away by the weather than were ever worn away by service.

True as this is, very little attention has been paid to the science of machine care. Experimental stations will work for years to show how to grow forty bushels of wheat where only thirty bushels grew before. No one questions the usefulness of this work, but it takes the difference of a good many acres to pile up enough dollars to buy a new binder. And yet, very little time is spent in showing how to increase the life of a binder from six to fifteen years. Perhaps they leave it to the common sense of the farmer. If they do, all right, for common sense is really the thing that is needed.

Three Cardinal Principles

College instruction—ancestral advice—and original research in the care of farm machines can all be summed down to these three elementary necessities—good roofs, good paint and good lubricants. These three determine whether the days of a machine shall be long in the land or whether it shall soon return to the dust whence it came and another order go to the firm who made it. Let every farmer attend to this trio. How and when are questions which each must answer for

himself—not very profound questions—but very important.

Few people realize how simple and yet how essential such care is, and for those who have overlooked this phase of agricultural life, we give the experience of one successful farmer which may contain helpful suggestions. This man ran a big farm and in spite of inefficient help and long used soil, made money. He was a firm believer in the above mentioned triumvirate, and he practiced what he believed. Back of his barn he had erected a long low shed, not particularly showy or expensive, but dry, and under this shed he kept everything in the equipment line—from grindstone to wagons. In one end he built a home-made improvised paint shop. Although his reputation as a family man in that country was good, it is said of him that he would just as soon leave a member of his family outside all winter as his mower or his drill.

One Farmer's Care

When he finished his plowing, he saw to it that his men brought the plow back to the shed. He then went over it thoroughly with a coat of white lead and it was left that way all winter. In the spring a little kerosene or turpentine was applied which loosened the paint so that with the first contact of the ground the share came out smooth and shiny like a mirror. "That plow," said the farmer, "cost me thirty-five dollars. The paint cost about thirty-five cents, and it made the plow last ten years longer. That is just an illustration," continued he, "of my procedure with every machine I own. Every two years I made it a point to go over all the binders, mowers, and all the other machines I had on the place, with a good metal base paint. I even painted the knives of the cutting machines the same as I did my plow, and I found that with a little application of turpentine or kerosene they became bright and shiny before the first circuit of the field was completed.

"I didn't use up all of this paint, because I felt more friendly toward the paint dealers than I did toward the International Harvester company. It was merely a matter of economy with me because paint was cheaper than new machines. Perhaps also the question of pride helped a little, because I always liked to have everything about the farm clean and bright. I generally use red because I like that color and because red lead is better than white lead for outside work. I kept even the tongues and whiffletrees of my wagons as good as new. They were mostly made of locust in my country and, when properly painted, would last a century. This painting was not just a hobby; I found that it paid, as at one time I sold a binder which I had used steadily for six years, for over two-thirds of what it cost me, and I didn't cheat the fellow either. It was practically as good as new. I was a paint advocate all right, and it seemed to me that hired men might come and hired men might go, but my wagons, mowers and drills went on forever.

About Lubricants

"I was equally as 'cranky' on lubricants. When I first started farming as a young man, it did not take me long to find out that a hot box generally meant a ten-mile trip to town for a new part. I had just about three experiences of this kind and after that the most important bit of barn furniture, next to the paint can, was the oil can. Many a time since then, when I have seen my neighbors tied up in the middle of a workday with an overheated part, I have praised 'John, from whom all blessings flow,' as the University of Chicago boys say. I used to make it a rule, after each long trip, to grease my wagons with the result that they were always ready and always shipshape. I invented patent dust protectors of my own when none came with a machine, and where this was not possible I kept the exposed parts well cleaned.

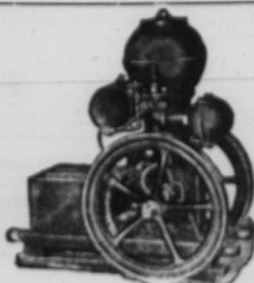
"Now all of this might seem rather unimportant to some farmers, or they might think it a great deal of trouble for

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nothing, but, in the long run, I never noticed the trouble and I found that it was a good form of economy. I farmed for many years at a time when prices were much lower than they are now and I made my farm pay. I do not claim that it was

all due to my caring for my equipment, but the fact that I made every cent of capital invested in the machines return the one hundred cents on the dollar, and then some, had a great deal to do with my prosperity."