

The Farm Demonstrator

All Around the Question

By Louis Macey, Lincoln County, in the "Nebraska Farmer"

A good many persons have been asking me for a year or more what I thought about the farm demonstrator idea and why I didn't "write something." The fact is that while I have not been "on the fence" (for that implies sitting still and waiting to see on which side to jump—generally to the one most popular), I do say that I have found this a big question with many sides. Let me begin with a story; it is old, but the lesson is badly needed, so it should be ever new:

There were three men of Indostan

To learning much inclined,

Who went to see the elephant,

The all-of-them-were blind.

Of the next three verses I have lost the rhyme, but they are to the effect that the first blind philosopher stumbled up against the elephant's "broad and sturdy side" and at once proclaimed his ultimatum: The elephant was very like a wall. The second one chanced to clasp the knee and at once declared that "e'en the blindest man can see this wonder of an elephant is very like a tree." The third, reaching out more cautiously, grasped the tail and was perfectly satisfied that the elephant was just like a rope.

And so these men of Indostan,

They argued loud and long;

While each was partly in the right,

They all were in the wrong.

The Lesson of the Blind Men

It is nearly thirty years since I read this in the old school reader, but the ridiculousness and pathos in it gripped me, and the lesson went home; and tho I have forgotten the rhyme of the three verses, the picture of those three men so limited in "seeing" and yet so positive in their notions has been ever vivid before me. We have all seen the same thing, with variations, many, many times.

Men butt up against one side of a question and then in too much of a hurry, or too much prejudiced to look further, they proclaim what they have "seen" as the whole truth. Often they attack bitterly and belittle men on the other side who are equally honest, but equally blind, for no one is so blind as he who will not see. Prejudice limits one's visualizing powers to just what he has within his grasp. I care little for popular approval, but I do value my self-respect and the integrity of my own thinking. When I do sometimes "butt in" on superficial observation only, and make a loud noise too soon, then later my humiliation is no less than if some one else had called me down.

So I have tried to see all sides of this question, and if another person has truth I want his truth. If he is in error the only way I can convince him of it is to point it out from his side after honestly viewing the matter as nearly as I can from his standpoint. Certainly, the other man is likely to be just as intelligent and honest as I am. Let's go around it together. If the critter has only one side, and one leg and a tail, we had better let it alone, but perhaps there is more. Here is the drama as I have seen it.

Scene 1—Big Business cogitates over the high cost of living; sees it will have to pay its employees more if it continues; concludes the farmers are lagging behind and raises a fund to send out advisers to teach the poor fools how to run their business.

Scene 2—Farmers rise in wrath; declare Big Business has an axe to grind and that they are not dumb critters to be ridden; proceed at once to buck so fast and furious that the adviser gets "nerves," and the extension department hardly dares to bring one out until the dust settles.

Scene 3—The extension department, the United States Department of Agriculture and Congress think there is good in the demonstration idea; make an appropriation; score Big Business for giving it bad name; frantically seek one more acceptable—like demonstrator, farmers' agent or hired man, and so

on; stoutly maintain that he is not an adviser unless in a very minor sense.

Scene 4—Violent movements; loud noises; much dust; glimpses (at a safe distance) of some funny performances; it seems as if the advisers are sticking; maybe they are tied on; you cannot but feel that each of them should have a belt, or maybe a medal or an iron cross.

Does the Farmer Need Advice?

I am not prejudiced, and it makes no difference to me what you call this person, but with all due respect to those eminent gentlemen who assert he is not an adviser, I must say that if he is not an adviser, he is "not much." Does the farmer need advice? Certainly he does, and no one but the blindly conceited person presumes to "know it all," even about his own business. So why not be honest and frank about it? To admit that we need advice is not a confession of weakness, but a perception of the fact that modern farming is a most intricate business, calling for more brains and more different kinds of brains than anything of which I know.

In fact, the whole world of business has long ago discarded the Miles Standish motto: "If you want a thing well done do it yourself," and today we say, "If you want a thing well done, hire a man that knows how to do it." Does the farmer ask advice? Certainly he does. There is no denying that. But in common with other human beings he hates officious, meddlesome, unasked-for advice, and that was what hurt, tho of course

he indicates, tho you know he gets a percentage of all the business he sends there.

Would it not be well to own the services of our own man who could honestly tell us if it were any earthly use to spend dollars for dope, and to use elbow grease to rub it on some callous, or bump, or curb, or spavin? To be sure we would not expect our man to be a "highbrow" lawyer and financier, all in one, but this merely shows that we do ask advice and pay for it—when we have to.

It is curious to see a man go to experts for these things and then underrate his own calling so much as to ask advice of just anyone about soil problems, breeding, feeding, crop rotation for his own peculiar conditions, marketing, up-to-date construction for modern needs, and the thousand and one things that are likely to bob up for which he has no precedent, and which involve some technical knowledge. Time and again I have been asked such questions, and most all of them I would be very foolish even to try to answer.

Free Advice Plentiful

However, there is always some philosopher, with a "tail-holt" on any subject, who is voluble with advice, and it's free. Are we satisfied with that kind? But are these young sprigs any more competent to give advice? Perhaps not all of them, but I have confidence in the good judgment and sifting ability of the men at the head of the extension department of the univers-

things? Why, ye-es. We stand around at the institutes and elbow in close to see the lecturer demonstrate the good and bad points of some exhibit. Perhaps he goes a little slow on the bad points because of the touchy exhibitor's fierce glare. Explosions and rows are not pleasant, and would it not be better to have these things pointed out to us in the privacy of our own lots, or do we already know it all?

Some years ago I urged a sand hill ranch man to try growing alfalfa. He had tried it once and lost about \$45 worth of seed and had never gotten further than thinking about it since. After I had explained my methods, which were radically different from those he had tried, but were successful for me on similar land, and after I had talked as persistently as a book agent, he agreed to try it again. He did so, and the second year he furnished a demonstration and sold \$400 worth of seed.

But here is the point. I doubt if half a dozen men who needed it ever saw that demonstration, or if even one inquired into it carefully. It was "nobody's" business to show it and the lesson was lost. Wonderful things could be done by demonstrating the growing of alfalfa in rows and sweet clover in rotation on the uplands, but left to himself the farmer requires a long time to get at it right, and a still longer time is required for the proof to spread.

Farmers Not Experimenters

The average farmer tries a thing only when he is enthused over an idea, and then he tries it on too large a scale, or his enthusiasm diminishes when he begins the work, so the experiment is neglected. Perhaps because of an imperfect knowledge of conditions it fails to be of any value, and he discontinues it in disgust or tries it in an entirely different manner next time. Our experiment stations have proved that to eliminate sources of error, and to find the limiting factor that makes for success or failure, trained men, careful work and series of years are required.

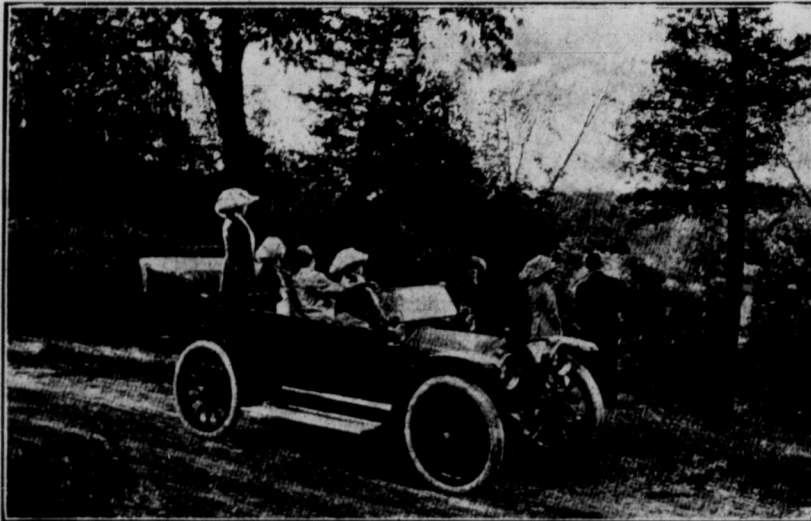
My idea of a farm demonstrator is that he would be experimenting with two or three things, and experimenting properly and to some end, in every township. The stations furnish data that is reliable, but it must be worked out with other factors, chiefly peculiarities of soil types, found in other localities before it is available for those localities. Someone has said that we need co-operation more than demonstrators. I believe that the office of the adviser, demonstrator or agent would be the rallying point of the best and truest co-operation, for according to my idea co-operation does not mean simply uniting to buy of, or sell to, the outside world, but to buy and sell things among ourselves as well.

Don't fool yourself into believing that the traders are all in Chicago or that the middlemen all live in towns. Within five miles of my old home in Missouri in a thickly settled community were two men who practically lived on horseback. They made it their business to know every farmer and that which he wanted to buy or had for sale. They also knew which ones were in hard circumstances and had to sell something.

Among farmers who had "feelings" against some of their neighbors, among those who were hard up or were too busy to look around, and among some who were not posted on values, those horseback farmer-middlemen did a big business in selling boars, sows and pigs, stock hogs, cows, yearlings, horses and colts, and they also distributed considerable advice—free. They bought hogs or calves from one man and sold them to another, perhaps not two miles away, often having a thing sold before it was bought. Sometimes two and even three deals were made on an animal before it finally left the neighborhood.

As to profits—Well, one of these

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Some people think this is how a district representative earns his living

the knowledge that Big Business had an axe to grind contributed to a "buck" on the proposition.

But let us see. Do we not ask advice of other interested parties with axes to grind? You have trouble with Neighbor Jones over a line fence and some trespassing hogs. That is a part of farming, but it involves law. You confess your ignorance of the law and go to Lawyer Slick for advice. You know that he is interested in getting a case, but you pay for his advice without a murmur. Perhaps you decide to feed cattle or to make some kind of a deal.

It involves finance and markets so you go to your banker for advice, or if you are wise you do.

Paid-For Information

You want to buy an eighty, and you get the advice of the real estate man, the abstractor, and the lawyer. You pay for it and are guided by it, even tho some of them are "young sprigs" and part their hair in the middle. Something is the matter with some of your stock, and tho you call yourself a stockman, you admit that you don't know everything about your own business, so you go to the veterinarian and pay him for his advice. You also take his prescription to the drug store that

ity, and I believe that any man they pass will do us good. Being in direct touch with the university and the experiment stations he will be in a very good position to grow rapidly into his work as an efficient and trustworthy adviser.

But he is a demonstrator, too. Do we ever need such a person? Sure, we do. A dozen times I have been in an implement house when someone came in or telephoned in and said something like this: "Say, that machine (or engine, or windmill, or stove) I bought of you doesn't work right. Send out your expert, or I will have to bring it back."

Then the expert hopped into his automobile (the farmer would be good and mad if he fooled around and walked out) and went to the home of the farmer to demonstrate to him how to operate the implement, tho it was a farm machine, and the farmer is supposed to know his business. However, I have never known a farmer in this plight to resent being shown. Moreover—let me whisper it—I have known farmers to kick themselves and thank a chance demonstrator who happened along and showed them how they had assembled wrongly some kind of machine, and they had been working it that way all summer.

Do we need demonstration in other