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Editorial

What About Farm Tractors?

Several thousand farmers in the prairie provinces are beginning to think they must have a farm tractor of some kind before next season's crop is seeded and harvested. Horses are high in price, and going higher. Before next spring farm horses will change hands at higher prices than they have in all the history of the Northwest. They are scarce, and so are men to handle them. More farmers than ever are planning to farm with fewer horses and fewer men. Naturally, they are considering the motor and trying to find out what they can of the working and lasting qualities of the various makes of steam, gasoline and kerosene tractors now on the market.

Aside from what the manufacturers themselves have to say of the merits of their own engines, and demerits of their competitors', buyers cannot find out very much. This is an unfortunate state of affairs, particularly in view of the fact that a forehanded exhibition association has been conducting tests with farm tractors for three years now, and expert judges have been "revealing facts" in connection with the engines competing therein and the kind of work they did, which facts have been presented in the form of a "table of results," with figures to the third decimal place, giving draw-bar pull, brake horse power, maximum horse power, pounds or gallons of fuel used, acreage plowed, the time required to plow it and so forth and so on, to an end which few men know the meaning and the average mortal hasn't time to bother his head about. Consequently, when a man considers that he ought to invest three or four thousand dollars in motor and equipment he hasn't much practical data to guide him after all. About all he can do is to buy the engine

that is sold by the most persuasive salesman and find out afterwards what he should have known beforehand.

This condition does not exist because of the fact that those who conducted the motor trials didn't have the idea that a lot of valuable information was being collated, but because the facts brought out have been presented in a form that only experts can comprehend—and quite a few of the experts seem puzzled over them. As was remarked some time ago in these columns what "experts" presenting facts for farmers and business men need most to learn is that the dollar and cents marks are the most widely known symbols by which facts scientifically demonstrated can be understood and the more of them that can be crowded into a table of results of a motor contest, the more general will be the benefit to be derived by those who need the information. Buying and selling motors is business. So should be the testing of them.

* * *

If the motor contest of 1911 is conducted along lines indicated at a meeting of sales agents and agricultural and implement journal men, held in the exhibition offices recently, farmers will receive more practical enlightenment next year than at former competitions. There was not a man, in about a score who were sufficiently interested to put in an appearance, but added his little to every suggestion for full details as to cost of plowing per acre. It is quite probable therefore that the engineer in charge will see that his assistants compute figures to give a simple and definite statement as to the practical efficiency of the different engines in the contest.

The tone of the meeting indicated that everyone appreciates the fact that this contest is designed primarily to show the farmer what can be done by the various makes of engines. If the test shows the farmer what horse power an engine of stated capacity can develop, its actual cost, and how much land it can plow in a given time, and the farmer sees these figures beside similar figures regarding engines of other makes he is not so much at the mercy of the agent. As a rule salesmen who talk engine are very convincing in their arguments. However, no prospective purchaser is obliged to accept all that he says. With a set of figures showing the actual work done he need accept all or none of it.

* * *

One good feature that likely will appear in the rules for the next contest deals with the basis of classification. Formerly the maximum brake test was used for this purpose. Trouble arose over some engines being thrown out of their classes, and it was alleged that other en-

gines in the same classes were not pushed to their maximum and that the men in charge knew when they had their engine high enough and refused to develop more power.

Be that as it may there can be no "jockeying" under the classification on a basis of piston displacement in feet per minute. Those acquainted with the technical work point out that it now will be to the advantage of the engine to develop its maximum.

* * *

Perhaps the most difficult point to settle in regard to a motor test is the matter of number of men allowed with an outfit during the plowing test. In the past this number was not limited and as a rule each outfit had at least double the number found in field conditions. The suggestion that three men shall suffice with a steam and two with a gasoline outfit sounds reasonable.

Nevertheless representatives of some of the companies maintained that with their engines one man can handle both plow and engine. On this score they argued that since the labor of one man was dispensed with points should be allowed on the score sheet.

If it is found that under ordinary conditions a man of average ability can do good work without an assistant it would seem that points should be given when only one man accompanies an outfit. However, it was claimed that it is scarcely advisable to encourage the practice of having only one man to run engines and plows. Perhaps the most forceful argument offered is that too many firms would attempt to run short-handed, and result either in accident or such poor work that the contest would develop into more or less of a farce.

* * *

Final drafting of rules and regulations for the contest next July remains with the committee of the exhibition board. This committee is anxious to have a competition that will enlighten the farmer regarding makes of engines and their capacity to do work on the prairies of Canada. THE FARMER'S ADVOCATE will be pleased to give space to practical suggestions from those interested. Perhaps a word from agriculturists might have some influence in the tenor of the rules and regulations under which the contest will be held.

Trouble in the Meat Business

Winnipeg butchers claim that meat prices have to go higher. They aver that present prices are unprofitable, that with the kind of stock coming in and the public's insistent demand for beefsteak, there is not enough money in the business. So they will probably increase the price.

To the average meat consumer there is not the relationship there should be between the