

Farming

The dairy industry, which has always played such an important part in the economy of our township, certainly needs special mention.

In early years, farming in the town was primitive. Measured by today's standards, life on the farm was rugged and strenuous. Ox and horsepower were used to till the soil. There was a minimum of farm machinery used in years past.

The horse was very valuable to the farmer. So valuable, that some might recall "if the weather was too bad for the horses on Sunday morning, the horses stayed in the barn, and the family walked to church."



William Kiekhaefer on sweep-arm cutting mower used for cutting clover for seed. Fly nets worn by horses. Picture from around 1908.

Farming was an art rather than a science. Habits, customs, trial and error, were the basis for most of the farm operations back then.

The first farm market products were grains, hay, eggs, livestock and homemade butter. In early times, these products were exchanged for merchandise. The storekeeper played a very important part in marketing farm products.

Farms and farming have changed dramatically since the 1880's. What would the reaction of the original settlers of the township be today, if they were able to return after 150 years?

In the 1950's the average investment for a farmer in livestock, land, buildings, and machinery was

\$17,000. In 1980 it was \$260,000. In 2005 it could easily top \$1,000,000. In 1955 it was hats off to any farmer whose cows averaged 10,000 lbs. of milk per cow per year. In 1980, 15,000 lbs. of milk, and today's average is 25,000 lbs. of milk per cow per year.

Farming locally has changed even more dramatically in the last 25 years, than ever before. Terms such as "Mega" farms, boasting over one thousand cows have begun to appear in the township. Some farms are now run more like a business, rather than a lifestyle. Most farms in the township today are owned and operated by families, but now hire additional staff and specialized people to maximize the farms potential. Luxuries such as days off, and outsourcing, are becoming more common, things unheard of years ago in farming.

Other terms unheard of in farming a few years ago, were things such as Nutritionists, Agronomists, Computerization, and "Cow Comfort", all of these taking a part in the role of the farm today. Nutritionist work to formulate better feeds for today's herds. Agronomists work on the best land usage and potential. Computerization has help improve the record keeping of not only the animals, but the finances, and land use too. The Internet today is a valuable resource for farmers. It allows them the world at their fingertips for buying and selling equipment and other farm commodities.

Building cow comfort into farms, such as cooling systems, clean sand bedding, more comfortable environments, has raised the potential of cows to last longer, and produce more. Genetics has also helped in the breeding of cows that can produce more milk, and live longer.

Other things that have changed on the farm are the outsourcing of different areas, such as calving, and harvesting. Many larger farms no longer raise their young calves. There are now specialty farms that raise young calves to heifers. Harvesting is now done by custom field operations.

Harvesting leads us into many other areas of farming that have changed. Today most farmers main crops are alfalfa, and corn. The corn is mostly used for silage. Other secondary crops in the area are soybeans, and wheat. Cash crops such as sweet corn and peas are not as prevalent. Equipment used for harvesting and farming has changed. In general, most of the equipment has gotten larger. Larger tractors, plows, and harvesting equipment are used.