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Archival Chronicle

Archival Chronicle Gallery

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America's Breadbasket

This issue of the *Archival Chronicle Gallery* features farm life prior to gasoline revolution. Quotations are taken from *Black Swamp Farm*, by Howard E. Good (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1967).

Planting and Preparation



◀ Preparing the Soil

If the weather permitted, the year's farming began in March with the sowing of oats. One year we got this job done in late February and were rewarded with an exceptionally large yield of excellent quality grain. Often, oats went into a field where corn had grown the year before.

— Howard E. Good, p. 117

Planting ▶

We used a grain drill for putting in oats and other small grains. Nearly always, the drill was set to feed out with the grain seed a regulated quantity of grass seed. Red clover was commonly sown with oats and timothy with wheat. No grain drill in the area at that time had an attachment for applying fertilizers—commercial fertilizers were generally unknown until about 1919, when a sample was shown at the county fair.

—Howard E. Good, p. 117



◀ Field Work

Field work continued throughout the growing season. Note that the men are wearing broad-brimmed hats to protect them from the bright sunshine, and coveralls and long-sleeved shirts to guard against scratches, cuts and dirt. The horses, too, are wearing protection—the fly blankets help discourage biting flies from distracting the animals from their work.



Putting the Family in "Family Farm"

Milking cows was part of a routine ▶

...a few of the cows with amiable dispositions, exceptional intelligence, and tricks that we thought cute became special friends and pets of the family. Among them was a Jersey cow, so friendly and gentle that she was long a favorite. To the delight of visiting children, she allowed them to ride comfortably upon her back by the hour.

—Howard E. Good, p. 107





◀ Churning butter

Tedious yet simple tasks were often assigned to small children. Although this photograph may have been taken for "show," children often freed adults from such chores, allowing them to handle the heavier work.



▲ Farm Family

A prosperous farm family shows pride in their home. The large house and barn are visible in the background. Horses served a variety of purposes on the farm.

The majority of farmers in the area shows a preference for general-purpose horses..a few were proud owners of heavy draft animals...One saw rather often light, fleet-footed steeds used for carriage work or for the saddle.

—Howard E. Good, p. 97



Harvest Time

On a day that seemed to promise favorable weather, we started the mowing machine. We tried to keep the amount of grass cut each day within proper limits, to avoid rain damage to dry hay that we might have to leave on the ground too long. After the grass had wilted, we went over it with the tedder, which turned and stirred it, opening it to the sun and air two mower-swaths at a time. Next, the dry hay was raked into windrows...[then, a] contraption with...springy curved teeth deposited the hay into a windrow for further raking.] On rough ground, occupying that seat was almost equivalent to riding a bucking bronco.

--Howard E. Good, p. 125-126

Shocks of Grain

In putting sheaves into shocks, the harsh, stiff straw and the beards scratched hands and arms severely. Thistles, which could prick fingers cruelly, might be bound in some of the sheaves. Much carrying and lifting were involved and walking through stubbles, often long and tangled, was extremely wearisome.

--Howard E. Good, p. 129



Butchering hogs

Butchering hogs was done in the fall, often in October. Besides the meat, the fat from the hogs was used to make candles and the hair from the hogs' skin was used to make brushes. Many families kept their own smokehouses to prepare their bacon and hams. In addition to adding flavor, smoking meat helps to preserve it.

