

FORWARD

I wasn't the "Last Farm Boy", of course, but I surely felt my world had ended or changed when our horses left. More mechanization was coming not only to our farm, but everywhere—like a virtual flood. Changes were occurring in all phases of farming. Where there used to be hundreds of small farmsteads (80 to 160 acres) around the county, farmers began working 300, 400, 500 and more acreage. Now, a half century later, we find that most farmers work 1,000 to 2,500 acres and more. Today, horses only appear on Amish farms by Arthur, Illinois, and in similar but fewer communities throughout the nation.

A tractor that had been considered powerful if it could pull a three-bottom plow then might now only be used for mowing. If you told a farmer in the 1950's that one day soon he could discard his plow for no-tilling, he would have thought you a little crazy! Semi-trailers are now used to haul grain to Havana and ever-expanding local elevators. There are enormous grain "wagons" to unload huge, sophisticated combines that have heads for both corn and soybeans, and combines and huge tractors with air conditioned and heated cabs to help make weather a non-factor. How my Dad would have loved just one season with these modern marvels.

All of this wonderful new technology has come with a "price to pay". As the rural farm population faded into the cities, the small towns with their small high schools began disappearing through consolidation. After the small-town high schools closed, small towns like Beason and New Holland and others found that local groceries and other small businesses would not be able to continue, either. It is tough for me to see all these vacant stores in these proud little towns. Harder still is to view, what if anything, is left of their "center-of-attraction" high school buildings that once stood magnificently in Beason, New Holland, Elkhart, Kenney and Waynesville. Most of these once-proud edifices have disappeared or are in various states of deterioration. It is nice to see school buildings in Hartsburg (Emden), Middletown, Elkhart and Atlanta still functioning (as of 2011, anyway).

Enhancements and improvements in machinery size and technology haven't been the only farming changes that I have witnessed these past many years. Is there a barn

left in Logan County that still serves the purpose for which it was built? I rather doubt it—not many work-horses and way-fewer milking cows in barns today. But more than that, how many farmsteads do you pass today that have livestock? Hardly anyone today is feeding a few hogs or cattle or milking a cow or two as was the case in the not-too-distant past. The bulls or boars were at one time sources of important income for the men and women who raised pure-bred bulls or registered boars of various breeds. When I was a kid showing at the Illinois State Fair in the 1950's, boar and gilt classes of all the major breeds ran from 20 to 60 head or more per class! Today, fairs struggle to have 60 head TOTAL for the entire breed shown. In retrospect, the farm boy of those times, like the two-bottom plow, is gone—never to return. I suppose that is what I had in mind when I thought of *The Last Farm Boy* title for this book.

Though changed, farming has continued to grow and prosper. Current yields of over 200 bushels per acre for corn and 60 bushels and more for beans were unheard of a half-century ago. Land selling for \$6,000, \$7,000 or even \$12,000 an acre would have brought disbelief only a few short years ago. If we are to continue to endure and progress as a country, farming must continue to progress. My vision and belief for this future can best be expressed in the Future Farmers of America's creed that we all had to learn as “greenhorns” in Ag class:

I believe in the future of farming with a faith born not of words but of deeds.

Paul Beaver
A Vo-Ag student from the 1950's

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