

Graduating Thesis

The Hired Man Question

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The Hired Man Question

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The Hired Man Question.

There is no question at present that is as important to the farmer or even, perhaps, to the country at large, as the question of hired help on the farm. There are many things that could be suggested to improve the conditions as they exist at the present time. The solution of the labor question on the farm is scarcely begun when we think of the system by which labor is handled in other industries. The improvement of farm help would greatly benefit the agricultural industry in general; and in an indirect way this is of vast importance to all other industries, as they are all more or less dependent upon the farm and its products.

We find that the hired man on the farm is far less skilled in his work than his fellow worker

in other occupations. Many of them go to the farm, because they cannot find work elsewhere. A large majority of them only work for a very short period, and hence do not care whether they know anything about what they are working at or not. We cannot always blame them for it, as a large percent of the farmers are at fault as well. They do not plan to make things comfortable with the men who work for them. They often strive to get all the work out of them that is possible, regardless of the comfort or advantages of the hand. They are greedy, and only look at their immediate self, forgetting that in the long run, they are very much the losers.

A study and an investigation of these conditions is necessary to the future success of agriculture. Look at the literature and legislation now going on for the benefit of the laborers in other industries. There

are now one million city laborers in organizations etc., trying to protect themselves, and they are getting laws passed for their benefit, while the two and one-half million farm laborers are seldom ever considered. They scarcely know what an organization is. It is also very hard to find any literature to speak of along the line of farm help.

What is to be done? Many suggestions can be made. One of the first difficulties we meet between the hired man and the farmer, is the agreement in regard to time and work. The time should never be specified with a hand whom you are contemplating on keeping. The agreement should be, that the contract terminates when either party becomes dissatisfied. This puts the farmer and the hired man on the same basis. If the hired man is compelled to stay for a definite length of time, he may become dissatisfied, and his work

not only becomes unpleasant for him, but how long can a man who only owns the clothes on his back, be kept if he takes a notion to leave? If he does stay, he may be a source of much injury to the farmer. The farmer cannot well discharge him, because he is liable for the rest of the wages to the end of the time for which the man is hired. When taken to law, the sympathy is always with the laborer. Hence, when either of them is free after dissatisfaction of the other this embarrassment is prevented. Then again, farmers should have a general understanding with their hands as to what work they expect of them. This should be very clear, so that no trouble is likely to come up afterwards. As to pay, it should be prompt and regular. The hired man should also be rewarded with better wages when he does better work. A farmer that wants the best help should always

aim to pay a slight advance in wages over the best wages in the community. He should establish a reputation for himself as a man who pays good wages, and in turn expects good work from his men. He will then be able to get the best men, if he gives them proper treatment. If the hired man is a source of income or profit to the farmer, why should not the farmer be willing to share his gains in proportion to the amount of good the man has done him?

It is a wise plan to keep help the year round. This can be done easily by managing crops and feeding stock. Then when the farmer gets a good hand, he can keep him and he does not need to be continually getting new men every year. The hired man is thus much more satisfied, and will do the farmer much more good, since he is always accustomed to the place and conditions. If hiring for only a short

period, the farmer should get all the work out of the hand he can, and dismiss him as quickly as possible.

In hiring men, the lean men should be given the preference. They are able to do better work, and can get around better than their fat good-natured friend, who is always willing to be chatting with his neighbors. When night comes, the lean man is almost as fresh as in the morning, and not worn out by the extra amount he has been compelled to carry along. Then again, he is as a rule much stronger and more wiley.

The hired man should have the best of treatment. If he is not deserving of it, he should be dismissed at once, as he will never be of much benefit to the employer. No hand should be employed unless he can be considered by the employer as a companion. The farmer should be able to take him into his

confidence, more or less, and make him feel that their interests are mutual. He should be made to feel so much in harmony with his employer that he will be constantly saying, "our corn," "our steers," "our horses" etc. Then the relationship between the two is such that each will work for the others interests. The hand should be made to feel that he is responsible, in a large degree, for what he does. When he goes out to do a certain piece of work, he should be given general directions and so that he will understand clearly what is expected. The details should be left to his own judgement. In this way, the farmer should show his confidence in him.

The hired man should also be consulted as to plans and given credit for suggestions which he might offer. He may often have better ideas about certain things than his employer, and thus he would be a source of considerable aid. In

all cases, let him be free to think and act for himself. Do not bind him down to any fixed rules. Give him credit for what he knows, and encourage him to work as tho he were doing for himself. Let him feel that he is really and truly in a free country, with as many rights and privileges as you have. Be frank with him in everything you have to say. Keep nothing from him, if it can be avoided, that is liable to lead to dissatisfaction later. Do not deal with him in an underhanded way. Favors may be given, but they should be used with caution. Never allow anything to come up that will lead to quarreling. This is one of the worst things that can happen. If you cannot get along without quarreling, you should discharge the hand at once. Nothing you can do will lead to worse dissatisfaction.

Never send a man out to do

some dirty job that you would not do yourself. Be ambitious yourself, and lead the way in all the work. If you stand around and do not take an active part in the work, the hand will do likewise. It is not his interest to work when you do not.

It is a good plan to require the hand to read. Read a great deal yourself, and leave literature for him. You need not necessarily demand it of him, but if you have the literature where he has easy access to it, and give him time in the evenings, he will pick it up and read more or less of his own accord. If he is not of a studious nature, he is not the kind you want anyway. If it is his nature to be gone evenings and spare times, he is of far less value than the man who reads and thinks for himself. By literature on the farm is meant, farm papers and books relating more or less to agriculture. Of course, other literature is of no loss, and indeed of great value. The

farmer should have, at least, ten or more good farm papers. The hand should not only be encouraged to read, but frequent discussions with him will cause him to take far more interest in his work. This is the end which we should strive for anyway, viz: Make your interests his interests and his interests your interests. Let him know that you are as much interested in his welfare as he is in yours. This will bring about that harmony that is absolutely necessary to get the best results.

Another great mistake is made by most all farmers. They think they must work from twelve to sixteen hours a day to accomplish enough work. This is all a mistake, and the sooner the farmers realize that they can accomplish just as much work in ten hours in the field, as they can in twelve or fourteen hours, just that soon they will have greater satisfaction with

their men. No hand can do a farmer nor himself justice by working such long hours. He becomes drowsy and sluggish. He is cross with his teams. He is more or less on the outs with everybody, and everything. He has no chance, either, to read and know what is necessary for him to know. He is too tired at night for anything of that kind. All of these disagreeable feelings cause his work to be of an inferior quality, and he does not accomplish as much in his days work as the man who is fresh and active. By all means, make all the work systematic and regular. Begin work at a certain time, and quit as near at a regular time as it is possible. Have the meals prompt and inviting.

This brings up the question of board. Where there are only one or two hands, they must eat with the family. They should have just as good and substantial food as their employer. They cannot be fed at a

separate table, as they then feel (and justly too) as tho they are looked down upon. They should be treated as members of the family, and in turn they must be made to feel that they are expected to be gentlemen. This is a serious question many times, as little children will nearly always look to the hired men as examples. Thus we see how important it is for the men to be gentlemen. If they persist in being rowdies and immoral around the children, they must be dismissed at once, no matter what the consequences otherwise may be.

Another important feature on the farm that would lend far more contentment is the social aspect. The farmers as a rule work year in and year out without ever going to social gatherings or even visiting their nearest neighbors. They simply work and drudge their life away. This is not only a great injustice to them, but it

lowers the standard of farm life. It is only by constant contact with our fellow workers and friends that we make the most development or improvement. The man who shuts himself out from the world certainly will not derive the most good from it. Neither will he be able to better the community in which he lives. Our lives will be made much happier, and we will have far more to live for, if we associate with our neighbors. Stired men should be allowed some time to themselves occasionally. They should be given a horse or vehicle every now and then, to go where they can better themselves. It is true the man who is always on the go is not the man we want; but the one that chooses places where he can better himself is certainly the one to be desired, and he should be allowed time for his personal improvements and enjoyment. It will be a source of dollars and cents to the farmer,

as the man will acquire ideas from places where he goes that will often be of practical benefit.

This suggests another idea. Farmers' institutes should be started and maintained, where the farmers can meet and get new ideas about farming. Valuable discussions can be brot out on agricultural subjects of the day. Prominent men in agricultural pursuits can be secured to address the institutes on vital questions, and thus we will have a means of enlightening the farmers, and also their hired men.

For the future hired man, all means available should be used to give the farmer boys a good education. Agricultural studies should be taught in the district school, and the children should be taught the beauties of farm life, and how they may be able to improve the conditions as they exist. On finishing the common school, the boys should be given an ambition to go to higher schools and colleges.

The agricultural colleges of the different states should be filled with them. Thus they will be able to go out on the farm, knowing what to do and how to do it. They will be a means of raising the standard to a higher degree, and thus the entire industry of agriculture will be improved and there will be many beauties in farm life that now seem to be anything but pleasant.

Thus we see that when the hired man of the country have been improved, and their conditions made better, there will be improvement in all lines of agriculture. Since the agricultural industry bears such a close relation to all other industries, this question is of great economic importance to the country at large as well as to the farmer or the hired man.