When Necessary for Today's Farming

Metal Monsters Make Start Hard

By Diana Sheek

Huge metal monsters stand idle, glinting in the afternoon sun as though only temporarily asleep.

The red, yellow and gray machines were exhibits in a farm equipment display shown this week on the Loveland Drug parking lot. Tom Dunn, general manager for Walker Farm Implement of Kelim, was the instigator.

"The initial prompting of the display," explained Dunn, "was brought on because of the Beet Growers Association meeting at the Home State Bank Tuesday night. Secondly, the purpose being to let more people see what is being done on farms and ranches in the area to maintain farm capacity and production. I put this on so you'll know what farmers are doing these days to carry on big area production."

Brief Glimpse

Cooperating with Dunn in offering a brief glimpse of the machines being used on farms was Vern Nexx, the White equipment representative from Greeley.

Some of the machines on display in the parking lot included a $4,000 Harbison-Paine Double Decker, 12-row tool bar attached to a $19,000 White diesel tractor; an Eversman 41-foot tool bar attached to a $21,500 White tractor with cab; an $8,200 heavy-duty, 24-row tool bar attached to a $31,500 White four-wheel drive tractor; and a $10,500 red Hesston Stak Hand.

Referring to the cost of farming, Dunn pointed out, "Everything about machinery...are raw materials which are scarce and more expensive to acquire, the steel, electrical equipment and the safety feature required by OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Act). Also included, of course, is the labor market. We're all getting more per hour."

One Big Tractor

Dunn said that farmers in this area generally have one big tractor and two or three complimenting units while "some have two or three big ones. If you're going to afford the equipment, you've got to have enough acreage to justify it."

"Three generations back or in pre-depression days," he observed from experience, "anyone and his son could start farming with a plow, harrow and a drill and a team or two of horses."

He estimated a team of horses would cost about $300 and the tools about $200 with all the neighbors pitching in at harvest time.

"Today, a farmer could not possibly start a farm unless he had an inherited farm and a line of equipment...or some fortunate circumstance."

Dunn said a person starting a farm would have to buy possibly $50,000 to $100,000 of equipment. To justify that expenditure, he said the new farmer would need at least a quarter-section or 160 acres for just $50,000 of equipment. For $150,000 in equipment, he estimated the new farmer would need three or four quarter-sections.

"In one year, he's husbandman of a quarter-million dollar business," noted Dunn. "Some individuals in this area have a quarter-million crop, but the expenses are tremendous. Beets are an example of an extra good crop these days but several areas—beef, milk and poultry—are in serious trouble."

Feast to Famine

The equipment store manager called the farming business a "make or break, feast to famine" business.

Dunn said people viewing this week's display have been surprised to learn that such large equipment is used in this area while others have commented, "No wonder the price of food is so high."