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From Your Commissioner

Reflections on Growing Up On a Farm

Probably like all kids who grew-up on a farm, I didn't know how different my childhood was from nearly every one of my friends. I always loved to follow my father around and "help" him. I have no doubt that I was usually more trouble than I was worth. This week I thought I would write about ranging the birds, which we had to stop after 1969, due primarily to disease being spread by wild birds.

We used to put our pullets outside in the range shelters, starting in the spring. It was quite an operation, as the shelters and their bases had to be pressure washed, creosoted, and moved to a different range. We had over seventy-five acres fenced in, which was twice as much as we needed in any year. That was due to the fact that a range could not be used two years in a row. I can't remember how many range shelters there were, but there must have been at least a 150 of them (see photo). As we had just over 40,000 breeding hens on the farm, that meant that during the course of the spring through the fall, we had over 45, 000 pullets on the ranges.

My first recollection on that range was from when I was about 5 years old. I had on brand new pair of cowboy boots that I didn't want to get wet. The 1947 International KB5 (which we still have) was loaded up with crates of pullets and was parked next to a shelter, which was being filled with birds. I had gotten out of the cab, but I was standing on the running board holding onto the mirror bracket when Stanley Fogg, one of my dad's employees, came up to me, and in a very stern voice said; "boy, get your *'butt'* off the truck and get to work". I don't have any other memory of that day just that snapshot in time. I remember exactly where the truck was parked, but other than for that brief moment in time, my memory is blank. It is funny how one thing can stick in your mind so vividly.

To fence in that much land into so many different sections required a lot of fencing, there had to have been two or three miles of fence line. I recall that my first trip to J&F Farms in Derry, was with my father to buy rolls of fencing and posts, the trip was made in our 1966 International 1600, which while it is still a work truck only has 33,000 miles on it. In order to keep the outside fence line clear of brush, required a lot of work, but it was made easier by a vicious machine, which we still have, although the clutch on it, is shot. It is called a "Wilton" and it was made in Wilton, NH, it has a motor similar to that found on a chain saw. In the place of the bar, there is a swivel arm about four feet long with a saw blade on the end, of course with no type of safety guard.

To supply the water to the birds, required that thousands and thousands of feet of galvanized pipe had to be buried in the fields. Every so often there was a tee, which had an upright pipe on it, with an elbow, with a boiler drain on it, with a float attached to it, which sat in a water pan. One of those fields is used by the Alvirne School Farm and Emery Nadeau told me he plowed up a piece of pipe just this year.

Feeding all those birds outside was made simpler by feeding them on the ground. They received a daily ration of oats and pellets. Putting out the pellets was a simple operation; dad had modified a seeder to spread

them. All he had to do was drive around the fields and the birds followed, it was quite a sight to see. Feeding the oats on the other hand was a more labor-intensive operation. Spaced around the fields were a number of 55-gallon drums with lids on them. Dad had built a large plywood box on top of an old truck frame, which had small doors on each side from which to fill the barrels. That was also pulled by the 1956 International Utility tractor, which we also still have. The oats were then thrown on to the ground. As the chickens needed grit (small stones) in their gizzards to grind food, there was a grit box at the tongue of the trailer, which was large enough for me to sit in when I was five or six, so while my dad was driving the tractor, I would fill a coffee can with the grit and throw it around for the birds.

Perhaps another time I will write about how much fun (not!) it was to train the birds to go into their shelters at night.



Shawn N. Jasper – Commissioner