

SPP (FARMER) FARM LABOR SHORTAGE 1/5 - SPRAGUE

Blue Moon Ranch

HEREFORD CATTLE - SEED CROPS

MEDFORD, OREGON

November 28, 1942

Governor Sprague
Salem, Oregon

Dear Governor:

You are familiar with the farm labor shortage and its consequences. Undoubtedly you have received many letters from men explaining the tough time they have in harvesting and in getting their other work done.

With these thoughts in mind I want to tell you of four things I have done in an effort to increase efficient production as requested by the War Production Board and the hazard existing which may result in my curtailing operations instead. These four things are as follows:

(1). I cleared and drained fertile land heretofore never cultivated. There were 20 acres of good land which were cleared and placed in crop last year. Also, by digging $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles of canal, 98 acres of land was drained so that it could be farmed at the right time for planting seed.

(2). I mechanized the ranch. Three years ago I foresaw a possible farm labor shortage and consequently began buying every labor saving machine that came within the proper bounds of economical operation.

(3). I invented and built new labor saving machines that were not procurable from machinery houses. Do you remember when you and Dad visited the ranch prior to going though Camp White? At that time you saw the tractor operated sugar beet

weeder which was just completed and took the place of ten men. Later I built a sugar beet seed cutter and windrower combined which took the place of thirty-five men. Several of the farm machinery manufacturers sent their engineers to study and take pictures of this machinery, so possibly next year there may be some produced commercially.

(4). I imported out of state labor. Through various connections I was able to secure from the Sacramento Valley a group of good Mexican agricultural workers. When they were furnished with transportation, housing and food, plus a good hourly wage while on the job they agreed to help in producing the sugar beet seed crop.

In spite of these efforts to increase efficient production I am faced with a hazard which may result in curtailing operations instead. This hazard is loss of experienced farm help. No man can properly handle 350 head of cattle and farm 500 acres, of which a good portion is garden, without skilled machine operators and experienced farm labor. This summer, through our own efforts, bolstered by willing yet inexperienced friends, both men and women, from the town of Medford, I was able to get most of the farm work done about two weeks late. This resulted in sacrificing several hundred tons of hay still stacked in the fields which should have been chopped into the barns as feed to fatten steers.

My wife and I, along with one Army officer, one Naval officer, both on furlough, and two men from the ranch, just finished spending ten days riding in two feet of snow rounding up the cattle on a Government range. We were fortunate enough in finding most of them, but being late in the season there will

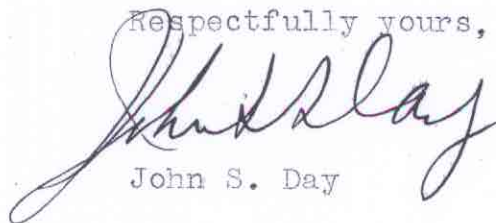
be a few head which we cannot find and they will perish as the snow gets deep.

So you see, Governor, there is just one darn thing after another. I feel that if I could keep the present skeleton crew of men on the ranch we will be able to make it all right. However, if the reduction in the number of available experienced farm help continues I will be losing to other defense industries the experienced men who operated the farm machinery so ^{carefully} purchased and built these past few years. I have tried and found that city high school kids cannot successfully learn in a short time how to operate intricate farm machinery.

Therefore, I am writing to you, hoping that you have some information on this problem that I do not have and I am asking your advice as to what policy to follow. Is there a possibility that those engaged in producing beef, wool, sugar beet seed and other farm crops will have enough help next year? Should I continue to try operating on schedule next year or should I cut down to a point where I know that the work can be properly done?

With kindest personal regards, I am

Respectfully yours,



John S. Day

JSD:es

December 5, 1942.

Mr. John S. Day
Blue Moon Ranch
Medford, Oregon

Dear John:

Your letter of November 28 was a very thoughtful discussion not only of your own problem but also of the general problem facing agriculturists in these war conditions.

I realize how much of a strain you have been under in trying to operate and maintain production because I have had some similar experience in operating my own business. Ours is a daily paper and there were times this Fall when we narrowly escaped failure to publish for lack of labor. At critical moments however some solution was found and we got by. Just now our situation is a bit easier but we do not know how long that condition will last.

You have certainly been fore-sighted in planning your operating methods both in acquiring power of machinery and in inventing other machinery which would save labor. I remember very well your power weeder and I am glad to know that it and other equipment proved practical in your operations.

I can well understand, too, your concern as you look ahead for 1943 and try to plan your crops. There are many reasons for pessimisms respecting the farm labor supply. The draft will continue to draw men from all parts of the country and war industries, particularly ship-building in this area, will need additional thousands of employees. In spite of this forbidding outlook, I believe that your best plan would be to maintain crop production rather than to restrict your operations for fear of lack of suitable labor. This may mean some loss such as you experienced in not being able to get your hay chopped to feed to your steers. The loss might be represented by actual inability to complete harvesting of certain crops, but you would be justified in taking the risk involved.

I feel there is a growing recognition on the part of those in control in Washington of the need of maintaining agricultural production and of the danger in further withdrawing competent farm labor. Then I believe there will be much less demand for labor in construction projects. The war plant is being pretty well completed in this country and that should release a good many good skilled and unskilled workers including a large number of tractor and truck drivers and men experienced in using and repairing machinery.

Then I am going to appeal to you to endeavor to maintain your production from a patriotic standpoint. The stuff you produce is definitely needed and certainly your job in this war is to stay on the farm and do your utmost, as you have been doing, in maintaining production.

I know it will mean a great strain for you and your wife, not only in the work but also in the worry which comes with managing large scale farming operations such as you have. You won't get any heroes medals but you should have the satisfaction of knowing that you carried on to the maximum of your ability in a time of need.

If all of us working on the home front use the same devotion to duty which those in military service are rendering in many exposed situations then we will get this job done in a much shorter time.

I hope, therefore, not only that you will maintain your maximum production to the fullest extent possible but that you will encourage other farmers to do the same. They will have discouragements and some loss but they then will never get the reproach that they failed to try.

I thank you for writing me and want you to know that I am very deeply interested in your problems and those of other farmers. That interest will continue and I hope through the medium of my newspaper to be able to be of help in the future in mustering the man power which is needed on our farms.

Very cordially yours,

CAS:B

Governor.