

What Happened to the Horses?

They were replaced by tractors, of course, but there are some interesting details.

The number of horses on US farms peaked near 30 million in 1920.

Tractors started to have an impact on farming around 1900. Nevertheless, horse numbers increased 10% from 1900 to 1920.

The tractors that existed before 1920 did not replace horses. Those tractors just allowed farmers to expand into the prairies. The huge tractors did that by tilling prairie sod resistant to sod busting by horses. Tractor engines also provided power for stationary threshing machines. That actually increased the need for horses.

Horses can be used to power stationary machines but the mechanisms for that are very inefficient.

Starting around 1920, tractors became small, agile and cheap enough to begin the 40-year process of replacing horses.

Horses were supplanted first in the grain farming areas. Most farms that were primarily crop producing used tractors instead of horses by 1940, many by 1930.

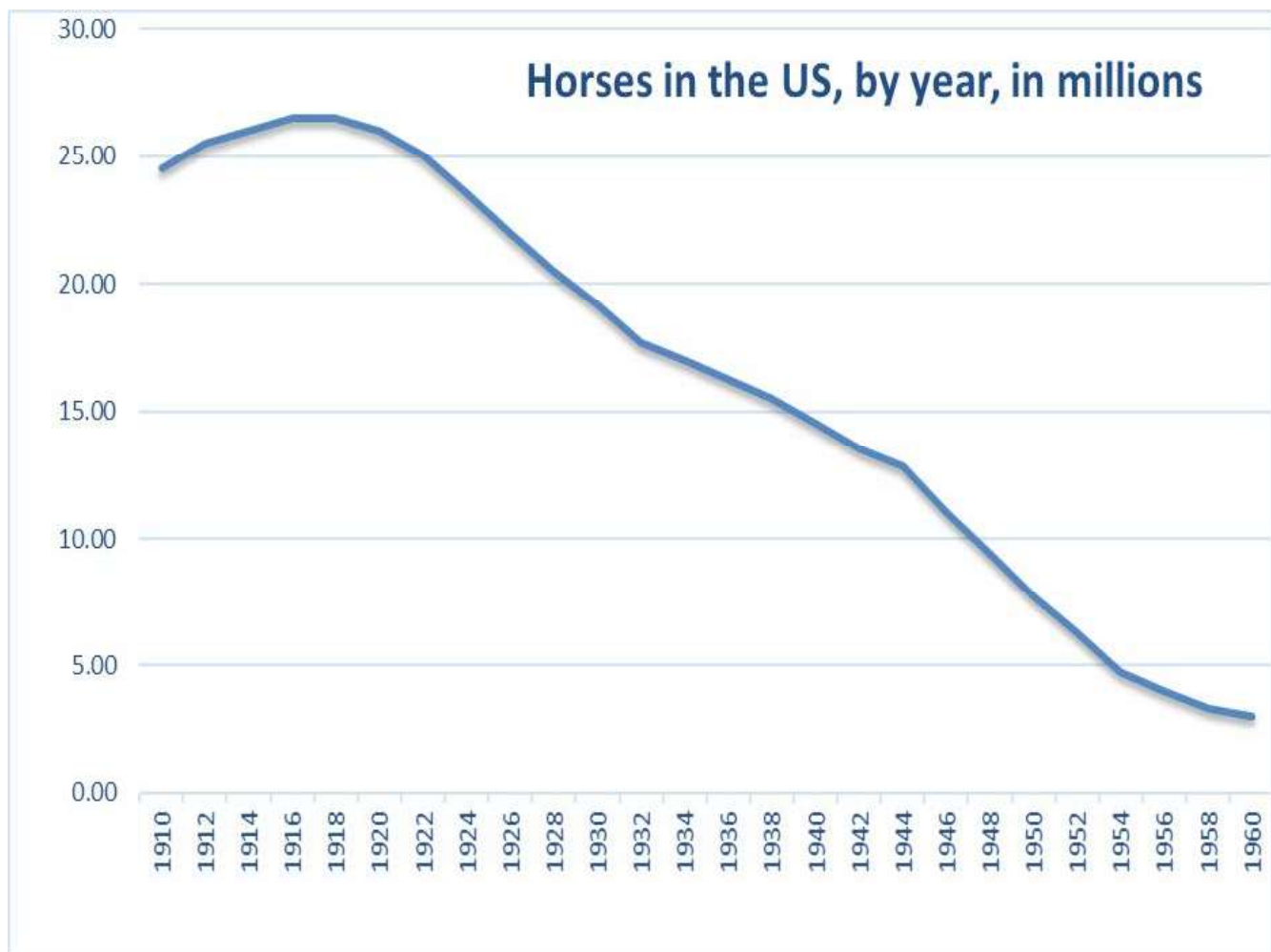
Most livestock and dairy farms of the upper Midwest replaced their horses by 1950.

The small farmers of the south and Appalachian regions were out of horses, or mules, by 1960.

It took specific tractor designs to do that.

The Standard tractors, such as the McCormick-Deering 10-20 and 15-30 were targeted to the wheat farms of the prairie country.

Row crop tractors were targeted to the mixed farmers who raised corn and hay to feed their hogs, beef and dairy animals.



Smaller tractors such as the Farmall A and B were targeted to the many low-acreage farmers of the south and to smaller jobs on Midwest farms. The very smallest tractors, like the Farmall Cub, were targeted to small part-time farmers and truck farms.

To tractor company marketing managers, the horse eliminating challenge was always on the small farm side.

Any tractor that could supply enough power to replace teams of three or more horses was sure to eliminate the horses from high acreage farms.

Tractors needed to be versatile, small and cheap to replace the single equine.

High volume sales were always on the small-tractor end of the market.

Tractor sales peaked in the early 1950s.

The number of horses hit a minimum by the end of the 1950s.

Tractors had replaced horses to the maximum extent possible. Today only the Amish and a few traditional farmers use horses for farm work.



Inter-seeding a pasture with the help of three mustangs..

