

Managing pastures with a Minnesota #4 Mower.

Photos on Facebook at "Snake River Farm Minnesota."

By mid-summer, the herds, bison, beef, and horses, have normally been rotated through most of the pastures at least once. It is a good management practice to mow the pastures in order to clip off the plants that the animals did not graze completely. Clipping off these weeds or stems helps to encourage regrowth of the desirable grasses and forbs.

I do that clipping, which is basically hay mowing, with a Minnesota #4 mower. The #4 is a ground drive, sickle mower. It is at least 80 years old and was designed to be pulled by horses.

The Minnesota brand of farm machinery, which included hay mowers, hay rakes, grain binders, manure spreaders, wagons and more was produced by the inmates at Stillwater State Prison.

The prisoners no longer produce farm machinery. I am told that they make office furniture these days.

Until a few years ago, the Minnesota machines were on display at the Minnesota State Fair. You may recall the "Prison Industries" building on the north end of Machinery Hill. I believe it has been remodeled to some other use.

The machines were and are of high quality. Hundreds of thousands were produced and sold by dealers all over Minnesota. Over 6,000 mowers alone were produced in 1919.

Sarah has placed a few photos on our Facebook page.

I mowed over fifty acres of pasture this summer without one breakdown.

Because the days were quite hot, I did some of the work using a Farmall model B tractor.

The Farmall B was designed in the 1930 s by the International Harvester Company. My father bought this particular tractor in the early 1950 s. It had been manufactured in the mid 1940 s.

It is a good little tractor and will probably run forever.

The engine produces about fourteen horsepower. Less than most riding lawn mowers.

There will be photos of both the tractor and of the horses pulling the mower on Facebook.

The mower was designed to run at the speed of a walking team of horses, so I drive the tractor at that speed.

The mower has a five-foot sickle bar and mows at the rate of about one acre per hour.

A team of horses can pull it for 4 to 6 hours.

The old mower does a nice job and is a joy to use even with the tractor.

I prefer the horses, however.

When mowing with horses the only sounds I hear are natural and quiet.

The sound of the machine clicking as the sickle moves rapidly from end to end of the cutter bar.

The harness jingling.

The horses' hooves thumping as they pull.

All somehow in rhythm.

I hope your summer has been good too.

Best regards

Tom



The Farmall B, pulling the #4 mower.



The #4 McCormick mower with five foot cutting bar.



The #4 McCormick mower behind a Pioneer forecart.



The #4 McCormick mower behind a Pioneer forecart the black team of John and Reno.