

## SELLING SPRING MECHANIZATION TO THE GROWER

J. L. Williams<sup>1</sup>

I wish to state at the beginning of this paper that I think a serious error was made in selecting me to write it, due to the fact that there are many others who are members of The American Society of Sugar Beet Technologists who are much more capable of writing on this subject than I am. I refer particularly, to the work that has been done in the Red River Valley, where figures show that the Company people and growers in that area have really made great strides toward mechanizing spring work while in most of our Great Western Sugar Company territories, we have not made very much progress along this line to date. I also wish to apologize for the fact that I am having to request Mr. J. D. Edmiston to present this paper for me, due to the fact that I cannot be present, personally.

During the spring season of 1944, 1945 and 1946, I have been connected with our organization in the Fort Morgan and Brush territory and I wish to state here that we have not done very much work on selling spring mechanization to the grower due to the fact that we had plenty of labor available, such as Texas labor, Mexican Nationals and prisoners of war, during those particular years. So my experiences in Morgan County are very limited along this line and I shall have to confine my remarks in general, to my experiences in the Loveland, Colorado, district from the years 1933 to 1943, inclusive.

My first experience, however, in cross-blocking beets was done, to a limited extent in Morgan County during the years 1928 to 1932, prior to going to Loveland. I tried to take with me some things I had learned along this line and tried to put them in practice in the Loveland district.

The job of selling spring mechanization to beet growers is one that, with few exceptions, as I previously mentioned, I do not think we have got done, to date and I think that if we are ever going to get it done, successfully, that "Necessity must be the mother of invention". In other words, what I mean is this--that we must first impress upon our growers that they are going to have to increase the amount of acreage worked per worker simply because the industry cannot afford to ship in as many workers for the spring work as it had done in the past. We must start our program of mechanization in January, February and March rather than in May and June when we are already "in a hole".

In 1933, in the Loveland district, we used mainly crooked shank duck feet for cross-blocking. Our fieldmen each carried one of these duck feet with him and in the winter contact with the grower he took it out of his car and showed the grower the principle of its use. He then explained to him the advantages of cross-blocking and finally, on that visit or a later one, he made the grower this proposition. "I am going to ask you to sign an order for a set of these duck feet and markers with this understanding, that when your beets are up and large enough to block, if in our combined opinion, you have a good enough stand to cross block then you will purchase

<sup>1</sup> Manager, Great Western Sugar Company, Fort Morgan and Brush, Colorado

these tools and try them out and if you are not satisfied with the work, after a fair trial, you are under no obligation to complete the purchase." We sold, that year on this basis, prior to planting time, 100 sets of these tools or roughly, 1000 duck feet.

After the beets were up and large enough to cross block, the fieldman called on the grower again and they looked the stand over and made their final decision on what to do. If they decided to cross-block the field the fieldman then showed the farmer briefly, how to mount his tools on the tool bar, gave him an order to the store room to get them and set a definite day and hour when they would try cross-blocking. On that day, when the fieldman got out there, the tools naturally were not set exactly right. Some more adjustments had to be made and the cross-blocking process was started. Some further adjustments were made in the field as they went along. Finally, the farmer was shown what kind of a stand he was leaving and was told to go ahead and not look back. The fieldman then left the farmer alone and gave him time to make two or three rounds and came back about the time he figured that the farmer would be disgusted with the whole process and would be leaving the field. Nine times out of ten, when he got back, the farmer was just about at this point. He then took the farmer and made some stand counts to show him what kind of a stand he was leaving although the field looked like it was ruined and in the majority of cases we were able to convince the farmer that the thing to do was to go ahead and finish the job. The best evidence that we have of this is that some years, by following the above practices, we cross-blocked as high as twenty percent of our contracted acreage in that area, provided that the stand would allow it. All of the above, you will have to remember was done during the days of whole seed and heavier planting rates.

Now as to my suggestions as to how to sell the proposition, under present conditions. In the first place, I think that we should tell the farmer that due to the advent of beet harvesters, we are getting completely out of balance between spring and fall labor requirements and it is going to be necessary to get along with less labor in the spring. Having in mind, that eventually, outside of hoeing, the spring work must come to the point of being done mechanically, completely. I think that one of the first things that we have to do is to impress upon the farmer the necessity of getting a good seed bed and controlling the weeds ahead of planting time and then we must plant enough seed to get a good germination stand under normal conditions and if conditions are poor, we will still have a stand that we can thin out with the long handled hoe and if the stand is good, we will have one that we can cross-block.

The program must be started in the early winter months and the ground work must be laid ahead of planting time.

The tools that can be used are many and I think the lower cost equipment that we can steer the farmer toward, such as duck feet or adjustable knives, is preferable to high cost equipment. However, there are some growers who will wish to purchase high cost equipment such as Soucci or Dixie blockers. I believe, in this case, that the thing to do is to agree with them in order to get the job done.

Some of the advantages of cross-blocking that can be enumerated are as follows:

1. Reduction of weeds.
2. Reduction of labor both as to the number of workers and the timeliness of getting the job done.
3. Reduction of the cost of growing the crop by being able to take advantage of lower rates on the thinning of cross-blocked beets.
4. Conservation of moisture. I am satisfied that cross-blocking the field will come very close to saving one irrigation and particularly in the years of a short water supply or in the case where pump irrigation is used, this means considerable saving to the grower.
5. Aerating the soil and stimulating the action of bacteria by increasing the soil warmth.
6. Keeping the marginal fields, such as weedy ones, from being torn up as I have yet to see a cross-blocked field which was abandoned.
7. Securing improved yields as I am firmly convinced that cross-blocking operations, all other factors being equal, will, in my opinion, increase the yields of beets by at least one ton per acre.
8. If the above selling points are finally put across to the grower, I think that we will have a grower who will continue with mechanization.

I am now about at the same position in this paper as the fat girl was who was crawling through the barbed wire fence, when she remarked "One more point and I will be through". That point is, namely, this - That if spring mechanization is to be sold, permanently, to the grower, it must be done on the basis that he is going to have to do the same amount of work with less labor than he formerly used and as a result that he will produce a crop with higher net return and this job can be done successfully only by personal contact on the part of the fieldmen in our organization as they are the salesmen who have to put the job across.