

Ag Week: Pony Drilling

submitted by Darrell Hovland

Years ago farmers planted a lot of their fields in the spring with a plow, packer, and a small drill. The drill was the width of the plow. It was called pony drilling and the name pony referred to the small drill used. You could turn the soil over and seed it all at the same time. Very efficient!

My Dad had 2 pony drill outfits. One was a 3 bottom plow which was pulled with a wide front A John Deere tractor and the other had a 4 bottom plow and it was pulled with a 70 John Deere tractor. Dad drove the 4 bottom pony drill outfit and one of us kids would drive the 3 bottom pony drill outfit.

Plowing a field with a tractor was actually the first use of Auto Steer. When you plowed you had a furrow and you would drive the tractor and put the front tire in the furrow so the tractor just had to follow the furrow. And that was the Auto Steer!

The plow, packer, and pony drill made for a long outfit and as the pony drill was the last in line it was difficult to see if your drill was seeding properly. The drill had a long container on it to hold the seed in and from there the seed would fall

into these little cups and from there they would fall down a tube and go into the ground and the small wheels on the back of the pony drill would go over the seed row and pack it in the ground.

It could be difficult to tell from the tractor seat if the seeds were coming into each cup like they should be so you would have to make sure the seed container on the pony drill was emptying into all the little cups. Occasionally you would stop and dig in the ground behind the pony drill to see if there was seed in the ground in each row. This was the most stressful part of seeding grain to me because you did not want to leave any bare strips in the field.

Driving a tractor with a pony drill was actually a good way to spend a day especially in the spring when the sun was shining. We did not have cabs on the tractors and we pony drilled in all sorts of weather. Sometimes in the spring you could still get a snow shower and it would be very cold sitting out there. I remember pony drilling wearing my heavy winter coat, a cap with ear flappers, and warm gloves.

Pony drilling was not a very hard job physically but you did have to pay attention. Not always

an easy thing to do for a young teen-ager! The most important part of plowing was getting a straight furrow. If the furrow was crooked the field would look very messy. All the farmers that I knew were very obsessed with making straight furrows. (Especially the Norwegians)

When you started plowing a field you would start the first furrow in about the middle of the field. Starting a furrow was called "striking out". Quite often my Dad would use a measuring device made out of wood and in the shape of a large triangle which I believe equaled so many rods. You could measure how many acres you had with this triangle. But I don't remember what the triangle was called. This triangle measuring device has been used for measuring land since homesteading started.

Dad would use it to measure across each end of the field to determine the middle and would then set a visible marker at each end to use as a sight to aim for when striking out a furrow. Sometimes he would use one of us kids as the marker. I guess this was an early version of GPS.

Our fields were not very large like fields are today so you would strike out a furrow in the



This vintage tractor, shown here in a 4th of July Parade down Main Street of Devils Lake in recent years, demonstrates the wide front tire placement in some John Deere Tractors. (Photo Louise Oleson, DLJ)

middle of the field and then along the edges of the field. A wider field though would require more furrows. Whenever we pony drilled Dad would always strike out the furrows himself. The area on the ends of the field where you drove on was called the headland and this was seeded last. Dad would always do the headlands himself too. Dad's fields always looked nice.

As we became teenagers Dad gave us more responsibility and would have us pony drill fields by ourselves if he was busy with other projects. When I was in my early teens, the first time I struck out a furrow by myself I didn't bother with measuring the ends

of the field. I figured I could just "eyeball" a straight furrow. Yeah, right!

I took a guess as to where the middle of the field was, then I started on the south end of the field, pointed the tractor to what I thought was straight north, and found an object to sight in on. And I was off making my first furrow. Unfortunately the object I sighted in on was a fence post in a fence line in the pasture and after I made the furrow I realized I hadn't been using the same fence post all the time as my visual. Apparently every time I looked away when I would look back I would focus on a different fence post. I made the crooked-

est furrow ever! At first I panicked a little, then finally calmed down and decided the best thing for me to do was to keep using that furrow and to try to straighten things out at the end. But when I was finishing up the field I had 2 furrows and the field came to a triangle. It was pretty messy! Fortunately though the field was not by a road so no one else could see it but I did learn how important preparation was before starting a project. Actually my Dad wasn't upset, he thought it was pretty funny!

Something else you had to be concerned with while pony drilling was rocks. The plow could turn over rocks that if the pony drill run over them there could be a lot of damage to it. Sometimes the plow would hook a solid rock which could damage the plow. So there were special hitches for the plow and tractor that if you hit a solid rock the tractor or the plow would stop.

The hitch we had on the A John Deere was I think called a Steinman hitch. Part of it was a chain that was attached on one end on the hitch of the plow, the other end was attached to the hand clutch on the tractor. So if the plow hit a solid rock the chain would

See AG | 5

NDSU Extension sets dates for youth farm safety camps

By Angie Johnson, NDSU Extension

NDSU Extension has set dates for youth farm safety camps in the Lake Region. The overnight camps help teens become familiar with the most serious hazards associated with operating tractors and agricultural machinery, as well as with the fundamentals of safe operation and maintenance.

According to the National Children's Center for Rural and Agricultural Safety and Health, young workers were 7.8 times more likely to be fatally injured in agriculture when compared to all other industries combined in 2016. Tractors and all-terrain vehicles are the leading sources of fatal events. When it comes to youth fatalities on the farm, 47% involved transportation, which includes tractors, 20% involved contact with machinery and 13% involved violent contact with animals on a farm. In 2021, the annual cost of childhood agriculture-related deaths was \$605 million, with nonfatal agriculture-related inju-



Youth learn the basics of safe tractor and machinery operation at an NDSU Extension youth farm safety camp. (NDSU photo)

ries at \$1.4 billion.

"These sobering statistics highlight the need for more training and education when it comes to having youth work on farms," says Angie Johnson, North Dakota State University Extension farm and ranch safety specialist. "NDSU Extension provides youth farm worker certification training that meets the U.S. Department of Labor Hazardous Occupations Order in Agriculture (HOOA) requirements for 14-to-15-year-olds to be able to legally work on a farm other than their own family's operation."

Youth will be able to learn about safe farm and ranch practices and earn their certifications at three statewide farm safety camps hosted by NDSU Extension in 2026.

Camp dates and locations are the following:

- May 27-29, Lake Region State College, Devils Lake
 - June 2-4, Dickinson State University, Dickinson
 - June 23-25, Bismarck State College and Joann Hetzel Memorial 4-H Building, Bismarck
- The three-day, two-night camps cover the basics of safe tractor and

machinery operation, general farm hazards, livestock handling, use of personal protective equipment, and basic first aid and first-response procedures.

"These camps help teens become familiar with the most serious hazards associated with operating tractors, skid steers, ATVs and agricultural machinery, along with the fundamentals of safe operation and maintenance," says Johnson, who is collaborating with NDSU Extension agents to conduct the camps.

Participants will receive hands-on experience and learning opportunities:

- Safe tractor operation, including a tractor-driving obstacle course
- Livestock handling
- All-terrain vehicle safety, including ATV certification
- Skid steer operation
- Roadway safety using rules of the road
- Farm first aid and emergency preparedness
- Laws related to youth working in agriculture
- Equipment operation and maintenance
- Farm stress management skills
- Farm hazard identi-

fication

Youth will have opportunities for hands-on learning, including utilizing farm equipment on obstacle courses to simulate actual farm situations. Livestock handling sessions will allow participants to interact with animals and learn more about animal behaviors and safety when working with animals. ATV certification and Stop the Bleed certification are also included.

Federal law under the HOOA requires that youth under the age of 16 receive certification of training before employment on farms operated by anyone other than a parent or guardian. The program is for youth between the ages of 14 and 15. Youth who are 13 can participate, and the certification they receive will become valid when they turn 14.

By successfully passing this program, which includes a final exam, participants will receive official certification to operate tractors over 20 horsepower and some pieces of farm machinery when working for a farmer or rancher outside of their family's operation.

"While this certification is not required for youth

to work on their own family farm, we encourage all teens who plan to work on a farm to participate in this program," says Johnson. "These camps are designed to strengthen communication skills between parents, employers and teen workers on the farm. Farm safety training prepares the next generation of the workforce with the safety skills needed to prevent injuries and fatalities on the job."

Camps are open to youth from all counties in North Dakota. Youth do not need to be enrolled in 4-H to participate.

Registration opens March 2, and the deadline to register is April 7. The cost of each camp is \$300. Registration for all three camps is available online at ndsugov.org/safefarmyouth26.

Sponsorships from businesses and organizations provide personal protective equipment and farm safety supplies for camp participants. Contact Johnson at angela.b.johnson@ndsugov.org to learn more about current sponsorship opportunities.

For more information regarding farm safety camp, contact a local NDSU Extension agent.

PROPOSAL(S) WANTED

Ramsey County is requesting proposals for GRAVEL PROJECTS, CHIP SEAL PROJECT, ROAD OIL & HOT MIX.

Sealed proposals for upcoming Projects & Supplies will be received by the County Auditor for the Board of County Commissioners, Ramsey County, North Dakota until 11:00 A.M., Friday, April 3rd, 2026 and will be publicly opened and read in the County Commissioner's Room in the Courthouse at Devils Lake, N.D. Each proposal must be sealed and addressed to the Ramsey County Auditor, 524 4th Ave NE Unit 6, Devils Lake, ND 58301-2487 and marked on the outside what the proposal is for.

If you have any further questions or want further details contact the Ramsey County Highway Department, 919 5th St SE, Devils Lake, ND 58301-3834 at 701-662-7015 for further information.

SPRING

CRAFT & VENDOR SHOW

March 28th • 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Holiday Mall • Hwy 2 & 20 • Devils Lake, ND

Don't miss this "ONE DAY ONLY" event!

For more information, please call:
Beckie 701-662-8165

Protecting What's Important in Life

416 3rd Ave.
Devils Lake, ND
58301

Call: (701) 662-2212

- Kim Zinke
- Armen Hanson
- Dan Ness

Farmers Union INSURANCE
Simply Different | fumi.com