

More than 100,000 F-10 loaders were built by Farmhand, Inc. over 30 years to build loose haystacks and move bales on the northern plains states.



Memories Of A Ranch Hand...And More

By Lorn Manthey, Contributing Editor

A FARM SHOW reader in South Dakota recently sent me a link to an auction video where they were selling a Farmhand Ranch Hand loader, a popular machine built in the late 50's or early 60's. When I looked at the video, it brought back memories from five decades ago when I did photography and brochures for Farmhand, the company that built the machine.

In my travels during the 1970's across the Dakotas and Nebraska, it was common to see Ranch Hands stacking loose hay in the wide-open fields. If memory serves me right, the Ranch Hand was built by an inventive South Dakota farmer who didn't want his Farmall H or M tractor continually framed in by a Farmhand F-10 loader. His solution was to build a power unit from the chassis of a dump truck. He used the truck's V-6 GMC engine and transmission to power it, then built a

square metal cab with the operator's seat and a few gauges facing the drive wheels, which were now on the front, with the steering wheels in the back. A 3-speed fan and roof air conditioner provided relief from those sultry prairie summer days. The loader was mounted on a high-strength frame behind the cab with anchor points near the front drive wheels, which were clad with deep-ribbed tractor tires. The engine powered a hydraulic motor to raise the 12-ft. wide basket 16-ft. in the air. The operator would carefully place loose prairie hay in square stacks 12 ft. wide, 16 or more feet long, and 10 to 15 ft. high. The weather would settle the hay, sometimes tires tied to ropes were thrown over the top to keep the wind from dislodging the hay, and large stack movers were used to haul stacks to a cattle yard or down the road to a distant customer. The Ranch Hand was truly

the prairie haymaker of its day. But that's not the end of the story.

When I worked for Farmhand in the early 70's, the company built 37 different products. Farmhand was known as a "short line" company because they didn't make tractors or combines. (Some people said they were short on engineers and short on management.) Their headquarters was in Hopkins, Minn., a suburb of Minneapolis, at the junction of Excelsior Blvd and County Road 18, adjacent to railroad and streetcar tracks...yes street cars! Just down the road was a large plant that built Minneapolis-Moline farm equipment. All of those buildings are gone now, replaced by 4-lane roads in both directions, a large Super Valu warehouse, and several 4-story condos.

The name Farmhand came from a South Dakota farmer who built a hay stacking loader for his Farmall tractor. He brought the idea to Hopkins and the Superior Separator Company, which later became Farmhand because loader production far surpassed the dwindling grain separator market. From the late 1930's through the early 1970's, Farmhand built more than 100,000 F-10 loaders. They were mounted on Farmall F-20s, H, M, and M-TA tractors. Some also went on other model tractors. Stacks built by those loaders dotted the grasslands, feeding thousands of beef and dairy cattle.

The success of the F-10 led Farmhand to develop stack movers, and eventually they had six or more pull-type and truck-mounted models. The company expanded on the F-10 with an all-hydraulic F-25 and later an F-11 and several quick-tach loader models for larger row crop tractors. They even built a down-sized loader to fit the popular 8 and 9N Ford tractors.

The company didn't decline many product

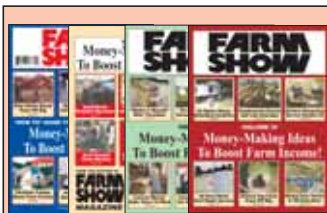


The Ranch Hand was a self-propelled version of an F-10 loader. This survivor was sold at a Montana auction in 2020.

ideas over 25 years, producing Hy Dump boxes, wheel rakes, a bale accumulator, self-unloading forage boxes, grinder mixers, sugar beet equipment, tillage equipment, silage blowers, big bale movers, tub grinders, pull-type hay stackers, and a grain processor. That diversity helped lead to their downfall, as did passing on others. For example, in the early 50's and 60's they declined to produce what became the Melroe Bobcat, the New Holland self-propelled bale wagon, and the very first large round baler.

The company at one time employed nearly 800 people in Hopkins and Green Isle, Minn., Grinnell, Iowa, and Greeley, Colo., but tough times in the 1980's eroded their business. They were sold three different times, eventually being acquired by a subsidiary of AGCO in the 90's.

While none of those original Farmhand products are made these days, other companies have picked up the slack with a wide range of modern equipment that are variations of those ideas. Like the company, old Farmhand equipment is now a faded memory in agricultural history.



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