

HORSE V. TRACTOR.

FARMERS' DOUBTS ABOUT MACHINES.

RIVAL CLAIMS SURVEYED.

(BY OUR AGRICULTURAL CORRESPONDENT.)

Many farmers are still unconvinced that the land tractor is better adapted to their needs than horses, and there has been recently a noticeable change in favour of the horse, which cannot be accounted for wholly by natural predilection for the animal.

The chief advantages of the machine are its greater speed and lower cost per acre. The former is especially important in the fickle British climate. The tractor gains over the horse in that it can be kept going all day without interruption, a great advantage in seedtime and harvest, whereas the horse has to be fed and rested after a limited number of hours. Apart from the belief that speed and cheapness are usually synonymous, the tractor costs nothing for keep when not actually at work. It can also be used for stationary power work.

Increasing experience of the machine, however, discloses imperfections that were obscure although suspected during the critical years of the war, when speed was the supreme consideration and cost had to be disregarded. The first cost of the tractor is a drawback in the case of many farmers, but the expense and trouble of maintenance are still more serious. The average machine has a short "life" and repairs are expensive, while in spite of careful overhauling it may be put out of action for days or weeks at a critical juncture. This risk can be reduced appreciably by laying in a supply of "spares," a provision that has not been easily made in the past few years, but which should be included as an essential to the development of tractor enterprise on the farm.

COMPARATIVE EFFECT ON THE SOIL.

Perhaps the chief reason for questioning the claims of the tractor is the effect of the machine on the soil. Inquiries on this point elicit contradictory opinions and the conclusion is justified that more experience is required to settle the issue. This diversity of view surprises no one who knows the variableness of the land of this country. The packing action of the tractor may be helpful on certain soils and harmful on others, and it is a fact that the weight of the machine pressing on the surface or in the furrow is, in the eyes of many, a serious drawback. On heavy land it is difficult to reduce tractor-ploughed land to a fine tilth, particularly if the work has been done when the land is soft. On the other hand, tractors can be used with advantage in surface cultivation when the land is dry and firm.

The horse is regaining his former position perhaps as much on account of his own economic merits as on the tractor's imperfections. The teams are no speedier than before and their powers of endurance are still limited ; but there has been a substantial drop in the price of the animals, and hay and corn have also fallen, so that their claims have improved to this extent. Then there is the old consideration that the farm can be self-supporting in the matter of horses and often have a surplus to sell.

With this end in view the teams are being largely made up of pure-bred mares, a certain number of which are bred from every year. There is a conviction in some quarters that the near future may see an improved demand for heavy horses for road work. Heavy motor vehicles, it is expected, will retain hold of the long-distance traffic, but the belief appears to be gaining ground that the fall in the cost and keep of horses will make them more in demand for shorter journeys. In this event an impetus would be given to the breeding and use of horses on the farm.

A balanced survey would suggest that there will be room for all forms of motive power—horse, steam, and oil—on the fully equipped farm, and the farmer who can call on either the animal or the machine that is best fitted for a particular task will be most successful.

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