

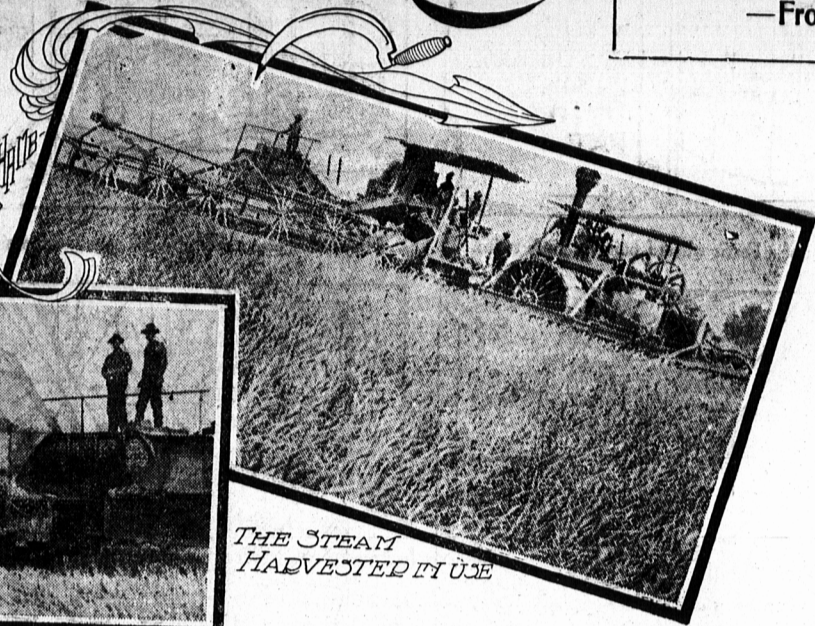
VAST HARVEST IN UNITED STATES

Europe and the Orient Interested in the Yield
 —This Year Marked Contrast to Last in the Great Yield—The Harvesting Dramatic from the Size of the Farms
 —From Mexico to Canada.

Harvest Time in the WHEAT EMPIRE



HARVESTING CREW IN THE WEST AND THEIR PORTABLE KITCHEN



THE STEAM HARVESTER IN USE



FORTY HORSE HARVESTER AT WORK

The eyes of the world have been on the American wheat harvest this year. Europe and the Orient are always very much interested in the yield of the grain fields of the greatest republic, for the foreign bread-eaters depend very largely upon Uncle Sam for the staff of life, but this year they are especially concerned, because of the failure of the crops in certain other countries that usually assist the United States in feeding our coastlands over seas. Fortunately, a record-breaking crop is reported from many of the giant wheat farms that are scattered over almost the entire area between the Mississippi River and the Pacific Ocean, and the indications are that the Yankee wheat dealers will be enabled to send abroad vast quantities of the golden yield with which to appease the hunger of folk of other nationalities.

Last year, it may be remembered, the exports of wheat from the United States were decreased because the crop failed in certain sections of the country and the surplus in other quarters, which is usually sent abroad, had, in a measure, been kept at home in order to supply the deficiency. Great Britain is this year calling for a big slice of the products of the American wheat harvest, and the cessation of war in the Orient will mean that Japan will require great quantities of wheat and flour. For some months past the Japanese market has been to a considerable extent closed to American wheat, because many of the Mikado's subjects have found their funds running low, and rice has been substituted for flour whenever possible.

To provide the most important item on the bill of fare for our own citizens and for the people of other climes an army of 50,000 men and millions of dollars' worth of harvesting machinery has been working day and night for weeks past on the "bonanza" farms of the West. This gathering of the sheaves in up-to-date manner has come as the culmination of almost a year of work and watching and worry, and no wonder the wheat farmer, whose all is at stake, awaits anxiously the verdict of the reapers and threshers and heaves a big sigh of relief when it is all over. There is no doubt, though, that harvesting as carried on in the "wheat empire" of Western America constitutes one of the most picturesque industries in the world.

It is, of course, the size of the farms which makes the harvesting dramatic and impressive in its magnitude and which has necessitated the invention of powerful and ingenious machinery, almost human in its work, which is the wonder and admiration of the man or woman who has been accustomed to the ordinary reaper and binder which is a familiar sight in the average farming community east of the Mississippi. The wheat grower of the West operates a farm—or, as he is more likely to term it, a "ranch"—of thousands of acres. A single field may contain 5,000 acres of waving grain. Yet this "bonanza" wheat farmer is confronted with exactly the same problems which bring furrows to the brow of the owner of a 100-acre tract back East. There is the same dread of rain ere the wheat can be harvested, and there is the same necessity for cutting the whole yield of grain just at the crucial moment—not a day too soon, lest it be unripe, nor a day beyond, lest it be over-ripe.

With this obvious necessity for harvesting almost simultaneously vast seas of grain that stretch from horizon to horizon, the wheat farmer of the West has been driven to take heroic measures. He must either employ a vast number of the smaller type of harvesting machines or else resort to those powerful time-and-labor-saving mechanical harvesters which are the latest product of Yankee invention. This latter solution appears to be the most generally accepted one, but there are a number of wheat farms where the managers still adhere to the smaller machines, and there are few more impressive sights in this work-a-day world than the spectacle of a serried, diagonal line of from 20 to 50 binders making its way across the waving yellow sea and cutting a path equal, perhaps, to several city blocks.

Even more typical of twentieth-century American achievement is the combined harvester, which is drawn by from 30 to 40 horses and harvests and threshes the wheat, ties the straw into bundles and acts the wheat in one operation, as it were. This not only does away with the old-style method of heading and then threshing the grain, but saves from one to three sacks of grain per acre, which was wasted or lost under the old plan. One of these new-fangled combination machines will harvest 40 acres of grain per day, and yet only four men are required to operate it. Practically, all that

is required of human hands is the driving of the big team and the tying up of the cleaned and sacked grain as it is delivered at the bottom of the machine ready for market. Every other function is automatic.

Yet another step in advance may be witnessed in the famous San Joaquin Valley, in California, where combination machines such as have just been described are operated by big traction engines instead of by the 30 or 40 horse teams. These steam harvesters can be used to best advantage on reasonably level land, and, consequently, they are as yet impracticable on many of the more hilly wheat farms of the Northwest; but in the great level wheat-raising territory of the Golden Gate State they are working wonders, single machines of this type harvesting as high as 150 acres of wheat per day.

The steam harvesters that whirl and chatter up and down the Valley of the San Joaquin are combination machines; that is, they, at one operation, cut the standing grain, thresh it, throw the straw into a receiver at the back, and after cleaning the grain pour it into sacks, which are tied by men sitting inside the machine. These filled sacks, each holding more than two bushels of wheat, are tossed by the men into wagons which are driven alongside the harvester as it progresses, and which as rapidly as they are filled are driven away at top speed to transfer the sacked wheat to trains waiting for the sack up on sidings of the Santa Fe Railroad, and which in turn hurry the grain to the elevators or to the ships which carry it overseas. The steam harvester cuts a swath 34 feet wide and requires only eight men for its operation, two of the number being the engineer and fireman.

This year has brought the same old problem of a scarcity of harvest hands. I have heard of wages as high as \$5 per day being paid in some sections of Oregon and Washington, but the average price seems to be \$2 per day and board. Even at this the harvest hands—mostly college boys on vacation and hardy young men from the towns of the Middle West—can save almost their total earnings, for there is no expense for lodging, most of the harvesters "camping out" in the wheatfields; one suit of old clothes will last through the summer, and a man who is working 14 hours a day in the open has few temptations to dissipate after working hours, even if he had the opportunity. A large proportion of the \$4,000,000 which will be paid for harvesting this year's wheat crop will go back as post-office money orders to some of those same savings banks from which it came in the form of crisp new bills only a few weeks ago.

A large proportion of the harvest hands are showing a disposition to make their work a vocation and are following it throughout the season. They have an opportunity to start in harvesting winter wheat in Texas in May and then advance up through California and Oklahoma and Kansas to Minnesota and the Dakotas to the Pacific Northwest, and finally to the wheatfields of the newly developed grain-growing territory in Western Canada they are enabled to keep busy almost continuously until early autumn. This journey from the southern to the northern boundary of the republic is an inexpensive one for the harvest hand, for the reason that his class of labor is so much in demand that the railroads are usually only too glad to allow the harvestworkers free rides on their freight trains in order to get them to the districts where they are off-times so sorely needed.

Out West the harvest time has no reputation such as it holds in the East, as the heyday of Cupid's activity. Probably this is due to the fact that in the wheat empire it is not the custom for the farmer's wife and daughters and all the pretty girls in the neighborhood to make a lark of preparing and serving the meals for the harvestworkers, as has been done from time out of mind in the East and the Middle West. On an 8,000 to 10,000 acre farm, where the harvesting of the wheat keeps busy for 10 days a force of dozens of men, this simple, old-fashioned hospitality is out of the question. The farmer must foot the board bill, to be sure, but the meals for the harvest hands are prepared in gypsy-like kitchens on wheels, which travel from farm to farm, as do the harvest toilers for whom they constitute a base of supplies.

The private in the harvesting army, which each year marches from Mexico to Canada, leads a strenuous life. If the cutting and threshing of the grain is being done on a "single shift," the toiler eat breakfast at 4:30 o'clock in the morning and supper at 8 o'clock at night, toiling constantly between those hours, save for a brief respite for dinner at noon. More likely, however, the harvesting is engaging the attention of two shifts of men. One set of crews work from dawn until dusk and are then relieved by others, who continue the activity through the night by the light of the moon or flaring torches. Day and night division superintendents in buggies—or in these days, in automobiles—ride up and down the line of the cutting directing operations, and making an estimate of the value of the crop, in case the owner wishes to take out short-lived fire insurance—a form of protection that will cost him at least \$5 per \$1,000 for three months or less.



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