

Alma Washington Mobile Home



A Year on the Farm



David Benson, a Minnesota farmer, shares his story about surviving with his family in a rural setting and his family's history of working the land.

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Work Holds Farm Family Together

John Camp
May 12, 1985



David Benson sits on the seat of the manure wagon, behind the twin black draft horses, reins in his hands, and he says this:

"Machinery can be intoxicating. You sit there on top of a huge tractor, rolling across those fields, and you feel like God. It's an amazing feeling, and a real one, and I think some people get so they don't feel complete without it.

"That's one of the reasons they keep buying bigger and bigger tractors, these enormous four-wheel-drives tearing up and down the fields. Tearing up and down. They are incredibly expensive machines, they'll run you \$16 an hour in fuel alone, and you can do in one day what used to take you three or four — but then the question arises, are you doing anything useful on the three or four you saved? You buy this gigantic machine with its incredible capacity, and all of a sudden, you're done."



"And you start thinking, 'My God, if I bought another 600 acres I could do that, too.' So you buy it, and then you find if you only had a bigger machine, you could buy even more. At the end of it, you're doing 2,000 acres on this fantastic Star Wars machinery and you're so far in debt that if anything goes wrong — and I mean if they stop eating soy sauce in Ireland — you lose the whole works, including the place you started with".

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"And it's not the same as losing in the city. These people are going around asking, 'Jeez, what did I do wrong? They said this was the American way, you try to get bigger and take a few risks, but nobody ever told me that if I lose they were going to take away everything, my whole way of life and my children's way of life and our whole culture and the whole neighborhood and just stomp us right into the ground.'

"My God, you know, people are bulldozing farmsteads so they can plant corn where the houses used to be because there's nobody to live in these houses any more. That's happening."

David Benson. He has horses, but he's not a back-to-the-land dabbler, not an amateur, not a dilettante — he has a couple of tractors, and a barn full of machinery. But he finds a use for horses. He likes them.

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