



Ken DeMers teaches student drivers how to harness, hitch and drive a team.

“TAKES A LOT OF MILES TO MAKE A PLOWMAN”

“Dirt Farmer” Teaches How To Drive Horses

In a day of huge tractors and self-propelled farm machinery, you wouldn't expect much interest in learning to drive horses. But this isn't the case for Kenneth Demers who has been running a school in horsemanship for the last seven years.

Demers, who says he is just a “dirt farmer”, holds his draft horse workshop three times every year on his farm near North Adams in western Massachusetts. The one-week course is offered through North Adams State College, North Adams, Mass.

The classes of 20 students have an opportunity to work with Demers' 10 to 12 Percheron draft horses, doing all kinds of farm work. Each workshop is a 5-day course. The first day is lectures and classroom instruction on the college campus, and the next four days are spent in learning to harness, hitch and drive a team.

The emphasis is on learning by doing. Says Demers: “I can show you how to plow in 20 min.; but you have to put on a lot of miles before I can make a plowman out of you.”

Students in the course drive teams in various farm jobs. One workshop is held in the winter, giving students an opportunity to drive horses in logging operations.

Students come to the horsemanship school from all walks of life. Demers has had doctors, businessmen, and farmers in his classes. About half of them are women, and they range from about 16 to 66 years of age. Up to now, they have come from 38 states, four Canadian provinces, and two foreign countries.

“In the seven years that I've been doing this, I've had nearly 300 students,” says Demers, “and they've been the finest people I've ever met. I guess there's something special about people who like to work with horses.”



Students come from all walks of life to learn horsemanship. Usually, about half of them are women.

The horsemanship course, which meets two weeks in summer and one week in winter, is so popular that it's usually filled five months in advance. Enrollment in each course is limited to 20 students so that everyone has plenty of time to work with the horses.

Tuition for the course is \$60 per person, plus room and board. Students can be housed in a college dormitory, stay at a nearby campground, or arrange their own motel accommodations.

The Demers farm where the course is conducted is a real “working” dairy farm with a 40-cow herd and 400 acres of farm land. Demers, a veteran breeder of registered Percheron horses, says there is an increasing interest in draft horses all over North America. The price of mares in some cases has increased 10 times over the last 10 years.

For more details, contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Dept. of Continuing Education, North Adams State College, North Adams, Mass. 01247.

FARM SHOW



EXPERIENCE FOR SALE

Retired Farmers Breaking New Ground

Retired farmers in a community, drawing on their experience and know-how, could set up a consulting farm management service for hire, keeping themselves enjoyably and profitably occupied. They'd want to incorporate, and publicize their consulting service to younger farmers or absentee landlords.

That's the opinion of Jerry Pratt, age 82, vice president of Experience Incorporated, a Minneapolis, Minn., firm employing primarily retired agri-businessmen and agricultural college professors and administrators.

The company has been in business a number of years and has dozens of retired persons who are available “on call” for assignment to projects in the U.S. and foreign countries. Last year, Experience Incorporated's billings exceeded \$2 million. Pratt and his partners work to stay active and to enjoy life in retirement.

Asked if a group of retired farmers in a community could expect to sell a similar “experience for sale” service to younger farmers and landlords, Pratt replied with a resounding, “Yes”: “The first thing they would need to do is sell themselves to potential customers — convince others that they could provide something of value, worth paying for. They could advise on such things as seed selection, fertilizer applications, book-keeping, and business management.

“Such a group would have to get themselves known so that people could turn to them for help when needed,” says Pratt. Also, he feels a company using retired people should hire some younger people “for their



The experience and know-how of retired farmers is being turned into a profitable consulting service.

energy, and to help sustain the company. Experience Incorporated has several people in their 30's and 40's on staff.”

“Fees charged could be based on hourly work or by the project. Or, a group of farmers might charge so much per acre, or per head of livestock,” speculates Pratt. “Such a company would want to have an attorney on its staff to deal with the liability of bad advice,” he cautions. “And don't get too big or unwieldy. Have a designated chief, a president, and a board of directors.”

Pratt believes a group of retired farmers could set up such a service on their own, or they could hire his company to help them get started.

For more details, contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Experience Incorporated, 1930 Dain Tower, Minneapolis, Minn. 55402 (ph 612 333-5231).