

**THEY TOOK IT OVER WHEN  
THE RAILROAD CLOSED IT DOWN**

# These Farmers Bought Their Own Railroad

By C.F. Marley

The last thing most members of the Cisco Cooperative Grain Company in Cisco, Ill., thought they'd ever do is run a railroad. But 13 years after the Illinois Central Gulf Railroad decided to bypass their town, that's exactly what the farmer group is doing.

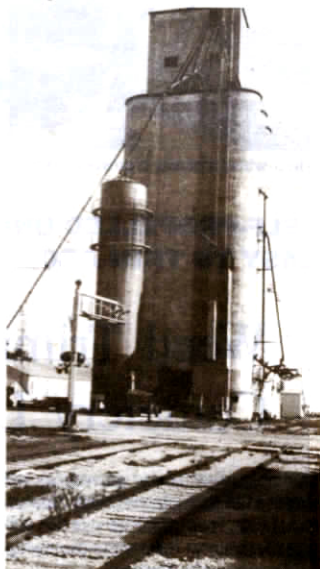
"Back in 1980 when regular railroad service ended, farmers thought they would never see a train in here again," says Bill Sago, manager of the Cisco Co-op, noting that without the railroad, farmers would have had to depend solely on trucks and could have expected shipping bottlenecks since the co-op ships some 2 million bushels of grain yearly.

When the mainline cut service in 1980 it was because the track was deteriorating and the amount of business did not justify rebuilding it. Soon after, farmers at the Cisco Co-op began investigating a farmer takeover. They started buying track and right of way back in 1983.

First they had to upgrade the track. This included laying 5 miles of track with heavier rails. The old 75 lb. rails were replaced with 90 lb. rails. Also, they had to install 12,500 new ties, haul in additional rock, and rebuild several crossings. To do the work, they got the help of a railroad contractor.

Legal entanglements delayed progress, too. Eventually the Co-op engaged the help of Indiana Hi-Rail Corporation of Connersville, Ind., to provide engines and rail cars to run the train between the elevator and Decatur where cars are picked up by the Illinois Central Gulf line.

The co-op spent \$425,000 to purchase the track and they put in another \$1 million for refurbishing it. Part of the cost was defrayed by a grant from the Illinois Department of Transportation.



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The Co-op ships out some 600 rail cars a year and can load out 30 cars in 3 hrs. There are times when that's what keeps harvest going in the area. It often results in a few more cents per bushel for co-op members.

"When the mainline closed, we had to do something. We knew the line would never be rebuilt. As we looked 25 years into the future, we saw no alternative to buying and running the railroad. It was a tough decision but it has worked out," Sago says.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Cisco Co-op Grain Company, Cisco, Ill. 61830 (ph 217 669-2141).

# FARM SHOW

# Ag World



Lingren used this portable sign to spell out his feelings about a proposed highway interchange that would have taken several acres of his farm.

## HE CHANGES ROADSIDE MESSAGE EVERY TWO TO THREE WEEKS

# Farmer Finds New Way To Make Protest Known

When the Iowa Department of Transportation proposed a new highway interchange that would take several acres of Iowa farmer LaVerne Lingren's farm, he came up with an effective new way to protest. He set up a portable sign - the type usually spotted on used car lots - and spelled out his feelings about the new highway design - in no uncertain terms.

Highway planners wanted to add two lanes to U.S. Highway 30 which runs by Lingren's farm. They also planned to build an interchange on his farm, but Lingren believed an interchange wasn't necessary.

"The sign gets your attention. People told me they started watching for it," says Lingren, who put up a new message every 2 to 3 weeks. "I put it up because I wanted to raise the level of awareness and sway political pressure and public opinion. A local newspaper published a photo of it.

"I thought the proposed interchange was a poor project from the beginning. I even took out a big ad in a local newspaper showing a birds eye view of the area af-

ected by the interchange and pointing out mistakes made by the DOT planning department."

Lingren bought the 4-ft. high, 8-ft. long sign from a local manufacturer for \$450 and chained it to a pair of fenceposts. The sign has a steel frame and translucent fiberglass facing with room for four lines. Individual letters are 12 in. high. Colored light bulbs flash on and off on top of the sign, and fluorescent lights keep the message visible at night.

Lingren's story has a happy ending. He recently called FARM SHOW to say that the state director of transportation recently recommended that the project be stopped. "A lot of people went to public hearings and also wrote to the commissioner. We also got help from a local state senator. Government still works if enough people get involved," states Lingren.

For more information, contact: FARM SHOW Followup, LaVerne Lingren, 312 - 220th St., Ogden, Iowa 50212 (ph 515 275-2285).



## Mini John Deere Great For Parades

"I always wanted a real John Deere 'D' but I could never justify the cost, so I decided to compromise and build my own miniature 'antique,'" says Mike Peterson, Elk Mound, Wis. "It's powered by a 5 hp. gas engine and a 3-speed transmission, both of which came from old lawn tractors. The hood came from a Cub Cadet and the steel front wheels, which are lined with rubber belting, from an old silo blower. I cut down pickup running boards to mount on the side and also cut down a radiator from a '78 Pontiac, building a frame around it from wood. The tractor has a hand clutch and hand throttle, just like an old Deere, and I run the carburetor a little rich so it pops like the real thing. It'll even blow smoke rings if it isn't windy. Various other old implement parts were used to build the rest of the frame and the steel-wheeled wagon we pull behind it. Our three children, Tiffany, Ashley, and Tyler, drive it in various parades and tractor shows. Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Mike Peterson, Rt. 2, Box 2520, Elk Mound, Wis. 54739.