

Where did June go ?

It is Tuesday night, a little after 10 pm. I'm just getting in. It got dark, the mosquitos were fierce, and we weren't getting anywhere, so we had to give up.

About 7 pm Marty came rolling in the yard on his '53 John Deere 70 Diesel. 'You want to do some plowing?' I did not. It had been a long day yesterday. This morning I got up early to load the van and get Angelica on her way for deliveries. The day kept going from there. It was hot. I was tired. He could see it. 'If you're not up for it, I can go plow for a while by myself.'

I couldn't let him do that. Marty had come over last night and plowed by himself since we were busy packing up everything that we had harvested during the day. It did not sound like he was making much progress. It was about 8:30 when I went out to see what was the problem. He was plowing under the rye and vetch in the green manure field to get it ready for planting soybeans. The rye was about five feet tall. The vetch had climbed all over it with vines that were ten feet long.

Marty was having trouble with his plow plugging up every time he started a new pass and at the end. A plow works by cutting a slice of sod and flipping it over. The coulter is a flat disk blade that cuts the sod into slices, the plow share cuts the roots and the moldboard flips it over.

When a plow plugs up grass or trash wraps around the upright that holds the moldboard and blocks everything from flowing through smoothly. Trash and dirt builds up and lifts the plow out of the ground. Now you have a several hundred pound piece of equipment sitting on top of a tightly packed, tangled mass of soil, rye, and vines. It has to be pulled out a handfull at a time while the mosquitos are eating you.

The real problem was that the vetch vines had grown up the rye stems and the plow shin was pulling the vines before the coulters could cut them off. The uncut vines were pulling a bale of rye and more vetch into the plow before you got started. The plow would plug up in about ten feet. Once it was going, it worked well until he got to the bottom of the field. There the peat soil would not hold the roots and the rye and vetch would come loose and shove ahead of the plow, plugging it up again.

So I told him that I would get hooked up and help with the worst parts. Once we got down there my plow was not plugging up as bad so I told him to start another section and I would finish up the worst of it. No sense in both of us spending a lot of time fighting this stuff. It was slow going. To add injury to insult, I stepped on a bee and got stung under my middle toe when I was wading around in the vetch trying to get the plow unplugged.

By the time I got the tangley stuff plowed Marty had made good progress on the rest of the field. It was about 8pm and we had just a couple acres to go to finish up. I went over and opened up the last section. Marty finished the section he opened and came over and worked on mine. It was still warm and the tractors had to run in second gear to make the hills without boiling over. There was one quack grass infested tough spot where Marty's plow came out of the ground, but other wise it went pretty well. When we finished, we pulled up by the quack that didn't get plowed and decided that coming at it from the other side, it should be possible to flip it over. Marty, always up for a challenge, said that he would get it.

So he goes out, gets lined up, drops the plow and his tractor stalls. Marty's 70 does not have a working starter. At the time JD put a small V4 gas engine (a pony motor) on their diesels to start them. You start the gas engine and it works just like the electric starter motor found on all modern cars, trucks, and sensible tractors from that era. Only that the pony motors were a notorious weak point. He couldn't restart his tractor. And I could not pull him and the plow on the freshly plowed ground, my H would just spin out. We had to unhook his tractor to him out. Once out, he rolled his tractor down the hill and it fired right up.

That's when the real trouble began. Marty backs up the the plow and cannot get the return line for the hydraulic cylinder to reconnect. The hydraulic couplers have a spring loaded ball that keeps dirt from getting into the system when they are disconnected. With the plow sitting on the ground, there was pressure the lift cylinder trying to force the fluid back towards the tractor. The weight of the plow acting on the cylinder created pressure that kept us from being able to push the ball back and connect the hydraulic line. It was dark. We were dirty, covered with oil, and mosquito bites. We gave up.

Before Marty pulled out of the field, I had to thank him for coming over and plowing. It was not at the top of my priority list that night, but he got me motivated to get out and do it. The field was plowed. A big job off of my to do list. He smiled a big grin and headed for home. I went in ate supper and tried to put out an availability for our Friday delivery. That did not work out so well either.

It was easy to get the plow out of the field the next day. I jacked it up to take the load off the cylinder, removed his cylinder, and replaced it with a single acting cylinder (my H does not have two way hydraulics). I finished plowing the troublesome patch, lifted the plow and drove away. The spent spinach beds got disked and rows were marked for transplanting the fall brassicas. Bex, Angelica, Colin, and Nate were busy hoeing and watering.

Thursday was another harvest day. It was not a big day for several reasons. Disked and marked rows for 2nd batch of zukes and cukes. In the afternoon we had some visitors from India. They are two Indian Foreign Service Officers, Mr. Abbagani Ramu and Mr. Vishwesh Negi. They had spent the last couple weeks in Washington DC studying US foreign policy and were now traveling across the country, visiting areas of interest in US – India relations, and stopped to see us. Meg Moynahan at the Minnesota Department of Agriculture set up the visit. About half of the fall cabbage, cauliflower, etc. were set out.

Friday I had deliveries. The crew transplanted the zukes and cukes, hoed and watered. In the afternoon we got a little rain. On Saturday I took the basket weeder off the Super C, mounted sweeps, and cultivated the potatoes, corn, peppers and eggplant. It was trying to rain a little, but the sweeps are used to uproot weeds and move dirt into the row to bury the little weeds there. The weeds are really taking off now. We are just at the point where we could lose control of them. In the evening Mary went over to Jen and Brian's to babysit and I rebuilt the carb on Uriah (our field truck).

Sunday I reinstalled and adjusted the carb, replaced the plug wires, and air filter. Changing the plugs will have to wait until I have time to run it and get it good and hot. They are pretty stuck right now. In the afternoon I cultivated the beans, tomatatoes, newly planted zukes and cukes, and winter squash. Beans have to be absolutely dry when you work with them or they will get rusty. There was a small amount of cultivator blight in the tomatoes and squash. To bury the in-row weeds, you have to go fairly fast, and there is only a couple inches between the plant and disaster.

There were a few bugs to work out of the CSA pick-ups, but they have gone very well. We are getting lots of boxes back and they are in very good condition. Thanks for being careful with them.

A few of the big chickens have finally adopted the chicks. The dominant hen, some big white breed that Al, over at Petersons, gave us when they were getting rid of their chickens, and one of her daughters have been showing the chicks how to find bugs. Today one of the chicks found a new hole in the fence and got out. The first time I cornered it and threw it back over the fence. The second time it was trying to find it way back in, but couldn't. The old hen came over to see what all the peeping was about. When I was trying to catch the chick this time, the hen would get all fluffed up and charge me. Of course she was on the otherside of the fence, but was undetoured. The chick got to a mowed spot where I could lift the fence and let it back in. The hen and chick made their way to the shelter of the trees. I got busy looking for the hole in the fence.

Greg