

Amish Animal Traction

Dale K. Stoltzfus



Abstract

The Amish community of North America prefers to work with horses or mules to carry out all the work of daily life, such as transport or tilling their fields. The need for draft animal power led to a robust culture of animal traction farming equipment manufactured within the Amish community, resulting in jobs in the field, keeping money within the collective, but also strengthening social bonds between Amish families clustering near by and supporting each other in daily tasks. Moreover, the working animals provide a valuable resource in the form of manure for fertilizer and animal power is compatible with the natural environment. Besides, the Amish farming communities are also taking their place within the worldwide animal traction community and provide valuable insights into the viability of their way of life.

Résumé

La communauté Amish d'Amérique du Nord préfère travailler avec des chevaux ou des mules pour effectuer tous les travaux de la vie quotidienne, comme le transport ou le labourage de leurs champs. Le besoin d'utiliser l'énergie des animaux de trait a généré une solide culture axée sur des équipements agricoles pour la traction animale fabriqués au sein de la communauté amish, ce qui a permis de créer des emplois dans les champs, de conserver l'argent au sein de la collectivité, mais aussi de renforcer les liens sociaux entre les familles amishes s'installant à proximité et s'entraidant dans les tâches quotidiennes. De plus, les animaux de trait fournissent une ressource précieuse sous forme de fumier pour les engrais et l'énergie animale est compatible avec la sauvegarde de l'environnement naturel. Par ailleurs, les communautés agricoles amishes assument pleinement leur place au sein de la communauté mondiale de la traction animale et témoignent efficacement de la viabilité de leur mode de vie.

Kurzfassung

Die Amischen in Nordamerika ziehen es vor, mit Pferden oder Maultieren zu arbeiten, um alle Arbeiten des täglichen Lebens zu erledigen, wie beispielsweise den Transport oder das Bestellen ihrer Felder. Der Bedarf an Zugtieren führte zu einer ausgeprägten Kultur der Herstellung von landwirtschaftlichen Geräten für die tierische Antriebskraft innerhalb der Amish-Gemeinschaft, was zu Arbeitsplätzen vor Ort führt, das Geld in der Gemeinde hält, aber auch die sozialen Bindungen zwischen den Amish-Familien stärkt, die sich in nächster Nähe ansiedeln und sich gegenseitig bei den täglichen Aufgaben unterstützen. Außerdem stellen die Arbeitstiere eine wertvolle Ressource in Form von Dünger dar, und die tierische Antriebskraft ist mit der Umwelt verträglich. Außerdem nehmen die amischen Gemeinden ihren Platz in der weltweiten Gemeinschaft der Zugtierhaltenden ein und bieten wertvolle Einblicke in die Existenzfähigkeit ihrer Lebensweise.

Resumen

Entre las comunidades amish de Norteamérica es muy popular el trabajo con caballos o mulas para realizar todas las labores de la vida cotidiana, como el transporte o el laboreo de los campos de cultivo. La necesidad de contar con la fuerza de los animales de tiro ha dado lugar a una sólida cultura de equipos agrícolas de tracción animal fabricados en el seno de la comunidad amish, lo que se traduce en puestos de trabajo en el campo, manteniendo el dinero dentro del colectivo, pero también reforzando los lazos sociales entre las familias amish que se agrupan cerca y se apoyan mutuamente en las tareas diarias. Además, los animales de trabajo proporcionan un valioso recurso en forma de estiércol para el abono y la energía animal es compatible con el entorno natural. Por otra parte, las comunidades agrícolas amish también ocupan su lugar dentro de la comunidad mundial de la tracción animal y aportan valiosas ideas sobre la viabilidad de su modo de vida.





Figure 1 – Three American Belgians pulling a White Horse Equipment plow at Horse Progress Days

The choice of equines for the Amish community

The Amish of North America are a group of Christian religionists who have agreed among themselves that included in their faith practices shall be the use of horses and mules for farm work and transportation. They now number about 300,000 souls. For those who wish to stay a part of the community the use of equine power is arbitrary. The rigid stubbornness of the Amish communities to practice horse farming has persisted in the face of a conventional race to modernity that has gripped the rest of the world. The paternalistic relationship of humans to animals often results in deeply felt respectful and loving relationships between the two.

Does it work?

The Amish people's use of horses and mules for farming has led to a robust culture of animal traction farming equipment manufactured from within. While the initial decision taken in the early part of the 19th century to farm with equine power was made apart from economically beneficial considerations, the economic power that has developed in the community in the present day displays unexpectedly welcome residual results. Manufacturing activities within the community provide jobs. There, the commercial exchange of goods within small clustered Amish communities, keeps money circulating within them, rather than having it lost to distant places.

Cultural benefits of limitations

Limiting farming practices to the use of animal traction limits the size of a farm to one that is more manageable for a nuclear family. Using horses for transportation keeps Amish communities in small clusters. These factors lead to neighbors and family members living in close proximity to one another making help and support of one another an almost involuntary reflex like breathing.



Figure 2 – Two North American Spotted heavy horses pulling a Pioneer forecart hooked to a Pequea manure spreader

Are there economic benefits to limitations?

The amount of capital needed to invest in a small animal traction farm in North America is much less than for a modern tractor farm. Smaller farms are much more intensely managed than large mega farms, consistently resulting in better profit margins without government intervention or support. The use of animals for farming utilizes a form of power that can replace itself in the form of offspring. Animals provide a valuable resource in the form of manure for fertilizer. Moreover, animal power is compatible with the natural environment.



Figure 3 – Two spans of American Belgians pulling hay mowing machines at Horse Progress Days

The gift of Amish ingenuity to the larger community

The present Amish communities in North America are large enough to be economically sustainable but small enough to mandate the self-manufacture of much of the equipment they need to farm. The results of this are a gift to the broader domestic and international community of animal traction enthusiasts and practitioners, who are able to avail themselves of it. These gifts are on display annually at a U.S. event called "Horse Progress Days", where they are demonstrated in actual field conditions powered by real animals, handled by practicing farmers. Many interested people from every worldwide continent have at various times been part of the 20,000 to 30,000 in people attendance to "Horse Progress Days".

Within the worldwide animal traction community, the Amish farming communities take their place as a microcosm to the worldwide animal traction community. The decision of the North American Amish community to farm with horses is carried out against the prevailing practice of fully mechanized conventional farming and is built solely on religious practices, that nevertheless result in economic viability. Thereby, this unique community takes its place in the worldwide animal traction communities of the world and in solidarity with them.

List of Figures

Title (An Amish woman drives her horse and buggy through beautiful farmland on a lovely summer day in Southern Indiana, USA) – D. Stoltzfus.

Figure 1-3 – D. Stoltzfus.



Author info

Dale K. Stoltzfus

E-Mail: logcab7@ptd.net

Digital paper: <https://youtu.be/D1t-Nnx1qOA>

The article is a transcript of the digital paper.

