

## National Matches in Iowa

National plowing matches, like the state and interstate events, originated in Iowa. The national contest was a natural outgrowth of the Corn Belt Matches started at Mitchellville in 1939, and continued so successfully near Boone in 1940, and near Albia in 1941, but cancelled during the period of World War II.

Preparations for the first "National" were started in the fall of 1945, immediately after the close of World War II. Secretary of Agriculture Claude Wickard's slogan "Food Will Help Write The Peace" was popular, but heavy cropping during the war years had depleted much land. Aware of the need for more soil conservation practices, the Des Moines Chamber of Commerce Agricultural Committee, headed by J. S. Russell of the *Des Moines Register*, undertook Iowa's first contour plowing match soon after V-J Day. Hosts were Master Farmer Lewis Morris and his son Lew Morris, Jr., of Grimes. A surprisingly large crowd turned out, indicating great interest in conserving and rebuilding worn land. Clarence Robuck, of Attica, a co-operator in one of Iowa's pioneer soil conservation districts, was named Iowa's first Contour winner.

Realizing the need for widespread emphasis on contouring and other soil conserving practices, Clay Barnett, Marion County district conservationist, and Herb Plambeck, WHO Farm Director, war correspondent, and member of the agricultural committee, met soon after the 1945 regional contest to discuss the matter. They agreed a meeting of Iowa farm and conservation leaders should be held to discuss the possibilities of a nationwide demonstration or contest.

The meeting was called in Des Moines early in 1946, with the Central Broadcasting Company as host. A veritable WHO's WHO of Iowa agriculture attended, including Dean H. H. Kildee and R. K. Bliss of Iowa State College, Secretary of Agriculture Harry Linn, Safety Director Bert Woodcock, Vocational Agriculture Director H. T. Hall, Iowa Farm Equipment Secretary Charles Chase, Grange Master James Carradus, Horse and Mule Association Secretary Cecil Rooks, Chief Harold Jespersion of the Iowa Highway Patrol, and others. Virtually all major farm machinery firms were represented, as was the United States Soil Conservation Service, *Wallaces' Farmer*, the *Des Moines Register*, and the Farm Bureau. Several farmers were also present.

Highlight of the meeting was Clay Barnett's proposal that a farm "face lifting" be held in connection with the proposed National Plowing Match. Great enthusiasm was expressed for this

idea, and a decision was made to hold a National Soil Conservation Day in connection with the plowing contest. It was also agreed that no parking or admission charges would be permitted.

Marion County, widely known for its soil conservation leadership, was awarded the first "National." Host farms were those of Clyde Milner and Cyril Rees. Elaborate plans were made for both the plowing matches and the conservation events. Chairman Walter Brown of Knoxville named twenty-two committees. Conservation events were planned under the supervision of soil district commissioners Paul Harp, Ralph Grundman, and Glen Newton, and were directed by Clay Barnett. Champion plowmen were invited from various Midwestern states.

September 21 dawned bright and clear. Visitors started coming early. By noon an estimated 50,000 persons were present, watching conservation demonstrations and plowing matches, looking over exhibits, and enjoying the program. United States Soil Conservation Chief Hugh Bennett, Farm Bureau President Allan Kline, Governor Robert D. Blue, and Legion Editor Frank Miles were speakers. Marilyn Steele, the pretty plowmen's queen, with her lovely attendants, led the pageantry. Flying Farmers flew their planes overhead. A 1914 model tractor and plow helped portray farm progress.

Plowmen from seven states competed for prizes

totaling \$1,000. Illinois and Iowa men became the first national champions. Paul Stiefbolt of Naperville, Illinois, won the level land class with Clarence Robuck of Attica, Iowa, winning contour laurels. Sixty-year-old Fred Jones of Colo won the level land section, and Charles Long of Gilman City, Missouri, nosed out Fred Freese of Shelby, Iowa, in the open contour section. Indiana, Nebraska, and Illinois plowmen won the safety prizes.

At the Milner farm "face lifting" some twenty-eight different water and soil conserving practices were demonstrated including contouring, terracing, watering, seeding, gully control, pond building, fence building, tiling, drop inlet construction, etc. More than 230 men with tractors and other machines were on the job. When the day ended the run-down farm had been made over. Dr. Bennett, in a coast-to-coast NBC Farm and Home Hour broadcast, declared: "This plowing contest and conservation demonstration was . . . the biggest, most significant one-day demonstration ever given on farmlands of this or any other country." The United States Soil Chief added that land mismanagement cost the nation four billion dollars a year, but farms under conservation plans returned an average of \$528 a year over other farms.

Dr. Bennett's statement, and the enthusiastic reception given the 1946 program by farmers, solidly established the National Plowing Match and Soil Conservation Day as the nation's foremost

farm event. Later, WHO's farm department won the 1946 Du Pont Radio Award, and conservation groups in many other states undertook projects patterned after the Iowa event.

Second of the National Plowing Matches in Iowa was held in Hamilton County on the Ralph Olsen farm in the Jewell-Ellsworth area on September 27, 1947. Albert Kooloff served as central committee chairman. Rain poured down for an hour early in the forenoon, threatening to ruin the day, but stopped in time for the program to go ahead. Conservation demonstrations were similar to those conducted at the 1946 event, with emphasis on drainage. Farmstead improvement and landscaping was done on the Thompson sisters' farm. Major speaker was Assistant Chief J. C. Dykes, Soil Conservation Service, Washington, D. C. Helicopter flights and aerial crop dusting were shown.

Thirty-five entrants from eight states participated in the 1947 plowing matches. National winners were Leo Drake, of Memphis, Missouri, in the level-land section, and Ronald Orr, Beatrice, Nebraska, in the contour division. State match winners were Elston Danielson, Ellsworth, and Gene Ferguson, Oskaloosa. Some 50,000 persons attended despite cold, wet weather.

The 1948 National Plowing Match was held on six farms embracing 2,000 acres near Dexter, Iowa. National politics shared the spotlight with

this great agricultural spectacle. President Harry S. Truman, a candidate for re-election, was special guest, and, in addition to watching conservationists in action, made the first of his now famous "give-'em-hell" speeches. Hosts were Mrs. Lois Agg, Roland Weesner, George Piper, Cliff Standly, E. W. Drake, and Howard Hill. Howard Walker was chairman.

On contest day, bumper to bumper traffic was the story on all highways leading to Dexter. More than 100 flying farmers came by plane. Highway patrolmen and United States secret service men estimated 100,000 persons attended. Dozens of conservation demonstrations were carried out, with President Truman among the spectators.

Each one of the forty plowmen from Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Missouri personally met the President and vied for \$1,000 prizes and trophies. National championships went to Dean Wilson of Ohio in the contour section, and to Paul Stiefbold of Illinois in the level land division. Iowa winners were Harrison Link of Tingley in the contour class, and Herbert Jones of Colo, son of the 1946 state winner, in the level-land section.

President Truman spoke twice, first at noon over national radio networks, and again at 2 p.m. In his second appearance he spoke informally and recalled his own farming days plowing with mule

teams and turning what his mother claimed to be the straightest furrow for miles around. Between the speeches the President enjoyed a fried chicken dinner served by the neighborhood farm women. Contest officials, land owners, and Colonel B. J. Palmer, head of the Central Broadcasting Company, dined with the President.

In 1949 the National was held near Runnells and highlighted work done in the newly undertaken Marybelle Watershed. Soil Commissioner Wilbur Goodhue was in charge. Hosts were the Waechter family, Fred Beck, John Ryerkirk, Paul Keeney, and Ben Lourens. Dr. Bennett, the "father of soil conservation," and Kent Leavett, past president of the nation's soil commissioners, were speakers. Serving as the co-sponsors were the Central Broadcasting Company and the Des Moines *Register*. Receiving national conservation awards were: Bennett, Leavett, Julius Lensch, Iowa; Everett Barr, Nebraska; Don Pharis, Missouri; Kenneth Ralston, Illinois; and William Benoit, Minnesota.

Farmstead improvement and silo building, as well as land "face-lifting" demonstrations, were featured in 1949. Eight states entered 37 plowmen to compete for \$1,500 in prizes. Dean Wilson of Ohio retained his national contour crown, and Paul Stiefbolt of Illinois, the 1946 and 1948 national level-land winner, retained that title. Iowa winners were Francis Hadsall of Colfax in the

contour class and James Warrender of Quimby in the level-land class. Some 65,000 persons attended the 1949 event.

Other plowing events of national significance were also held in Iowa in the 1940's.

In 1940 the *Wallaces' Farmer and Iowa Homestead* sponsored a United States International Match on the Charles Dengler farm near Davenport. It served as a prelude to the National Husking Contest and had entries from five states and from Ontario, Canada. Fred Timbers of Canada was winner. Iowa's Duane Sherril of Washta placed eighth. Art Thompson, associate editor for *Wallaces' Farmer*, and Julius Paustian, Scott County farmer, were in charge.

In the years 1943, '44, '45, and '46 Mills County was the site of some national plow terrace contests, with Iowa, Illinois, Missouri, and Kansas entries. Ray Jones, of SCS, was in charge. Sponsors were Omaha *World Herald* and Missouri Valley Association. Attendance of up to 20,000 was reported at the Malvern event.

WMT's Clean Plowing Matches were held in the spring of '46 and '47. Objective of the east-central Iowa matches was to help combat corn borers by plowing under all stalks and other residue in cornfields. Interest was high, with many contestants and thousands of spectators. Chuck Worcester, WMT Farm Director, was in charge. Prizes totaling over \$1,200 were offered.

The 1946 match was held on the Hanneman-Hensing farm near Newhall with Robert Bowery, young GI farmer of Milo, Iowa, winning out over 50 other contestants and receiving a \$500 first prize. Speakers included Governor Robert Blue, General George Olmstead, and Dr. Wm. Bradley, national corn borer research official. In 1947, when the contest was on the Earl Elijah farm near Clarence, 64 entrants participated, and Bowery repeated his victory. A crowd estimated up to 40,000, some of whom came by air, watched the clean plowing demonstrations, saw a farm gadget show, and heard Senator Bourke Hickenlooper and American Farm Bureau President Allan Kline.

The National Plow Terrace contest, held on the Mrs. Wm. J. Lewis farm near Harlan in 1948, was designed to demonstrate the building of terraces with the ordinary farm plow. A dozen entrants from Indiana, Missouri, Nebraska, South Dakota, Kansas, and Iowa participated. John Stoburg of Taylor County, Iowa, was national winner; Louis Buessing, of Kansas, 1947 winner, was runner-up. Julius Lensch, Shelby County soil commissioner, was chairman. A unique feature was an arrangement to park all autos on the contour. Attendance for the event was estimated at 10,000 persons. Major General Lewis Pick of the United States Army Engineers was the featured speaker.

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