

PURE RELIGION

A Harvest in Idaho

It is 6:00 in the morning in late October, and frost already hangs in the air over the sugar beet fields of Rupert, Idaho. In the predawn darkness, the sounds of gears and rubber wheels grinding against gravel grow louder as weary machines yawn and wade into fields to begin their work.

The long arms of the “beeters” stretch out over 12 rows, slicing the tops of the sugar beets. Behind them, the harvesters thrust their steel fingers into the soil and scoop up the beets, pulling them up toward a belt and into a waiting truck.

But this is not an ordinary farm, and these are not ordinary farmers. This is the Rupert Idaho Welfare Farm, and those who are working here today are volunteers. The harvesters, beeters, and trucks—at times more than 60 machines all working in harmony together—are all owned by local farmers. They have come to the welfare farm in an act of sacrifice to harvest the Lord’s sugar beets.

“It’s a completely volunteer effort,” says Orlo Maughan, a farmer himself and the first counselor in the Paul Idaho Stake presidency. “When farmers finish with their harvest, they come and work on the welfare farm. The farmers often pay the wages of their hired hands who come to help. We offer fuel for the farmers’ trucks and harvesters, but many won’t take it. They look at coming here as an act of consecration, a service they provide for the Lord’s poor.”

President Maughan says this work has been going on since the farm was created in 1962. It may be the only welfare farm in the entire Church where volunteers bring their own equipment and, often at their own expense, harvest the crops.

“I’ve never seen anybody who hasn’t been happy to be here,” says Bishop Tim Eames of the Acequia 2nd Ward. “It’s sometimes a challenge to gird up your loins and head over there after a long season of harvesting. When I was a kid, it was a duty. Now, it

gives me a good feeling—a sense of accomplishment. I want my children to see their father doing this. I want them to know that when you’re asked to do something, you put your shoulder to the wheel and push.”

During this year’s harvest, one of the farmers’ harvesters broke down on the last row. Soon, the machine was covered with farmers each doing their best to get it going again.



This effort of helping one another is something that happens frequently in this small Idaho farming town. “Tractors don’t get unhooked until everybody’s done,” explains Bishop Eames. “No one is finished until everyone is finished.”

Once the welfare farm is harvested, the farmers look to their neighbors to see if anyone needs help. This year, after finishing at the welfare farm, Bishop Eames went over to help a neighbor who hadn’t yet finished his harvest.

“He wouldn’t let us come,” Bishop Eames says, “so we came anyway.”

Bishop Eames knows something about this spirit of community service. When his mother passed away in November 1984, he still had 80 unharvested acres of his own. He likely would have lost that crop if 6 harvesters, 4 beeters, and 30 trucks hadn’t arrived—all from his neighbors—and brought in his crop for him.

That is precisely the sort of thing that happens every autumn in Rupert, Idaho, as members of the Church come to work at the welfare farm.

It is 7:00 in the evening, and the sun has set, leaving the land dark and cold once again. And the farmers of Rupert, Idaho, head back to their families, exhausted and happy.

They have finished well another day. They have harvested the Lord’s sugar beets.