

Clampitt has written a readable, useful book about an important aspect of midwestern agriculture. It is not a fact-laden study, but several points of factual correction are merited. John Deere's plow had a self-cleaning moldboard, not plowshare. Horse-powered corn binders were not used by many farmers because they were not practical. Horses could neither provide sufficient, consistent power to drive the mechanisms that cut the thick stalks and bound sheaves, nor easily power the implement across the corn field. The Payment-in-Kind program is not sufficiently explained to enable readers to understand the surplus-reduction process and income generation for corn farmers.

Even so, anyone interested in the history of American agriculture and the Midwest should find this study a good read. Consider it a must for midwestern libraries because it covers so many corn-related topics briefly and sensibly. It offers an informative introduction to the essence of midwestern agriculture and its related business and cultural significance.

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### *The Land of Milk and Uncle Honey: Memories from the Farm of My Youth*

By Alan Guebert with Mary Grace Foxwell

(Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2015. Pp. 134. Illustrations. Paperbound, \$17.95.)

Alan Guebert, an agricultural writer and columnist, has gathered together a delightful collection of his columns that help us to remember what farm life was like fifty years ago. Guebert's home farm, named Indian Farm, located in southern Illinois not far from the Mississippi River, was a large farm for its time: when many midwestern farms were 160 acres, Indian Farm was 700-plus acres. It was also a dairy farm with 100 milk cows that had to be milked twice a day, every day.

Farming has changed dramatically in the past fifty-plus years. In 1960, farmers made up more than eight percent of the U. S. population. Today, they comprise less than two percent. For hundreds of years, farming changed little; however, after World War II, tractors, electricity, hybrid crop varieties, fertilization, and modern weed control all helped transform American farms, farming, and farmers.

Guebert, with his wonderfully well-crafted stories, teaches us not

only about day-to-day farming operations, but also about the characters associated with Indian Farm, many of them hired men. Some stayed on for years and some left after a few days. “Tall or short, shaven or whiskered, educated or ignorant,” he writes, “most hired men came and went like the seasons—uneventfully. Faces in the manly crew changed often and, sometimes, overnight. A few remained for months, and only a couple stayed on for years” (p. 84).

Jackie was one of the long-staying hired men “who came with the farm when my grandfather purchased it in the late 1940s. That’s the way it was in the Mississippi Bottoms back then; like a barn or a fence, people often came with the land,” wrote Guebert (p. 84). Jackie was special. “He was an ageless bachelor who needed the job to support his mother and three brothers. And since he could neither read nor write, his destiny was that of a farmhand. He was the runt of the clan, five-foot-six and no more than 140 pounds when he still had all his teeth” (p. 84). As Guebert writes of Jackie, “A generation ago, there were a million or more Jackies in American agriculture” (p. 86).

One of the most notable characters is Uncle Honey (real name Lorenz), Guebert’s great uncle. Several of Guebert’s hilarious stories chronicle Uncle

Honey’s lack of mechanical skills and his propensity for creating disasters small and large. Uncle Honey was “quiet, kind, and generous. On a tractor seat, he murdered everything animate or inanimate. If Honey was astride farm machinery, mayhem was a moment away” (p. 81). In 1964, when Guebert’s father bought a new six-row, rear-mounted corn cultivator, Uncle Honey crawled on the tractor seat and drove out to the cornfield. As Guebert explained, “Two hours later, the tractor, cultivator, and driver were back in the farmplot with the driver complaining to my father that the new cultivator didn’t work” (p. 44). Uncle Honey had managed to destroy the new piece of equipment.

Guebert’s daughter, Mary Grace Foxwell, adds a delightful epilogue to the book, which includes some inside information about her author father. If you want an entertaining as well as an informative take on midwestern farming in the 1960s, pick up a copy of *The Land of Milk and Uncle Honey*.

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