

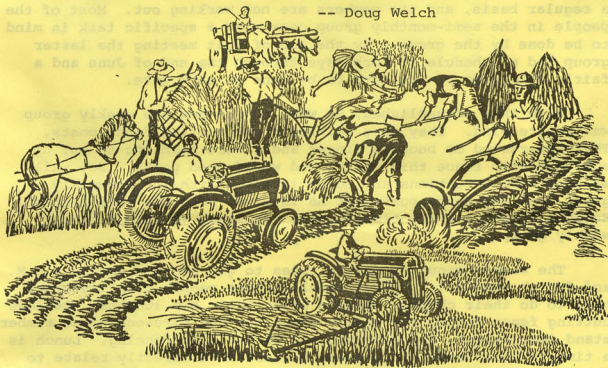
records of hours are being kept. The bi-weekly work group has cut firewood, planted white pine seedlings and cleared brush to re-claim a hay meadow. Ten to fifteen adults have attended the first two work days.

As you can see, these two labor cooperatives are different in their size and approach to a similar purpose. The personalities, preferences and needs of the members determines how the group organizes itself. Both groups are getting a lot of work done for their members. Hopefully, this discussion will encourage more people to organize work groups.

My involvement with both labor cooperatives has been personally satisfying. There is a sense of shared accomplishment--in contrast to the competitive aspect of our society where accomplishments are individual and one finds oneself at the top (or bottom) alone and lonely. I also enjoy the learning and sharing of information that can be part of working with other people. That whole process tends to be both stimulating and supportive.

Effective labor cooperatives with committed members could be a vehicle for re-building local rural life. Work days also serve a social purpose, strengthening the sense of community among members. Much of the work being done by the labor cooperatives are major projects that are developing our individual places. Even in the case of a bi-weekly group where each place is visited three or four times a year, it would not be hard imagining a farmstead being quite different two years from now than it is today. And, for me, that's an exciting possibility--to help others get their land into shape and to see our own place changing and becoming what we have envisioned that it could be.

-- Doug Welch



John and I belong to the "bi-weekly" group Doug referred to in his article. I have the advantage of writing just before press time, so we've got six work days under our belts by now, with one more to go in our first cycle. I know everyone in our group would agree that it's been worthwhile and worked at least as well as we hoped it would.

In terms of the time spent, we've probably come out about even--Montans could, perhaps, have planted their 2,000 trees in somewhat less than seven days; it probably would have taken us at least seven full days to remove all the old siding from our house by ourselves; the Ainsworths figured the time spent in the work group will probably work out to be the same amount it would have taken them to cut, split, and stack their 18 face cords of wood; etc.

One thing all of our jobs have in common is that they're tedious. The advantage of the work groups is that at least we've had a variety of tedious things to do, and it's been so much more pleasant working as a group. We've had great potluck meals, and the kids have had a good time. I've also enjoyed seeing other people's places and learning of their plans and ideas. Basically, it has just been a heck of a lot more fun working together different places doing different things than slaving away by ourselves at the same job day after day.

You also get a real psychological boost to see a major job finished in one day. Bill Ainsworth kept saying gleefully, "I can't wait to see the look on my father-in-law's face when he comes over tonight and sees that pile of logs has disappeared." In our case, the group started (typically) a little late--around 10:30 A.M. People swarmed all over our house with ladders, hammers, and crowbars (you should have heard the din from inside). Even including a long lunch break, they were all gone by 4:30 and so was the old clapboard siding. Most of it was cut up and stacked in our basement to be used in our yet-to-be-built wood-fired hot water heater. Just a small, neat pile waited to be cut up and thrown down the chute. All of the rest of the debris was gone--raked up into a pile to burn. It was amazing and gratifying--and I have to confess I didn't even work very hard.

As Doug pointed out, I think the neat thing about the two groups that have been established so far is that they are so different and yet the both work. They serve different purposes for people with different needs and schedules.

Since John and I (and many others in our group) work away from home five days a week, we are beginning to feel the pinch when one of our weekend days is spent working out in the work group. We just find it hard to keep up our momentum at home. So, we've opted out of another round right now. Three households have decided to go on through the summer, however, and the rest of us may very well decide to do another six or seven household cycle in the fall. It feels good to note that, once again, the work group concept is able to meet people's different needs and requirements.

-- Valerie Ingram

