

Competition and the Labor Supply

Wherever we have traveled in the past year, WTT has time and again run into a familiar complaint from small businessmen, whether arborists, or spraymen, or sod growers. We have talked to some operators who, far from expanding, are contracting the size and scope of their own businesses, and others who seem on the verge of giving up.

Their reasons are usually the same regardless of their field: stiff competition and a shortage of trained labor. Isn't competition the American way of business? Of course, the small operator answers, but lately it's become such a cutthroat proposition that many are losing money on a great deal of the work they perform.

And what of help? A small arborist or sprayman may have worked hard to build up a "fleet" of three trucks. But now he can't find the personnel to keep them operating. Often he just hires a man and begins to train him when his employe moves on. What is he to do about this? Hire another? Or, is there another available for the job?

The squeeze is on, and most informed prognosticators say it will get worse before it gets better. Is the small businessman going to be forced out? Perhaps not, if he will only convince himself that it's not enough to be just a good operator. He must also keep careful track of his business expenses. Turn to page 41 and you'll find a Floridian's suggestion that the operator's income may well depend

more on what he can save than on how much he can make. This comment was aimed at spraymen, but applies to many others as well.

The small operator has to be competitive, but to do so he must know where to save, and one way is to have adequate equipment. Obsolete equipment that costs too much to operate, or is inadequate for the job and requires more man-hours than a precarious labor situation warrants, is a liability in competition. The cost of mechanizing may be high, but the cost of substituting man-hours for efficient equipment is even higher.

We think this coming year will see more small businessmen turning increasingly to mechanization to stay in the competitive race. We hope that those planning to purchase equipment will match items carefully to their job needs, choosing those that are neither too large nor too small, but suited to increase the efficiency of their operations.

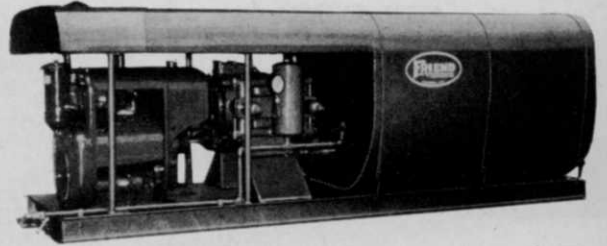
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