

Name: _____ Date: _____

Lesson 04.01: Word Meaning: Tracing the Tractor's Legacy
Reading: Tracing the Tractor's Legacy Text

Tracing the Tractor's Legacy Text

Read the text *Tracing the Tractor's Legacy*, following the lesson directions to highlight the details that show how tractors changed the world.

Tracing the Tractor's Legacy

Written by: Janis Devries

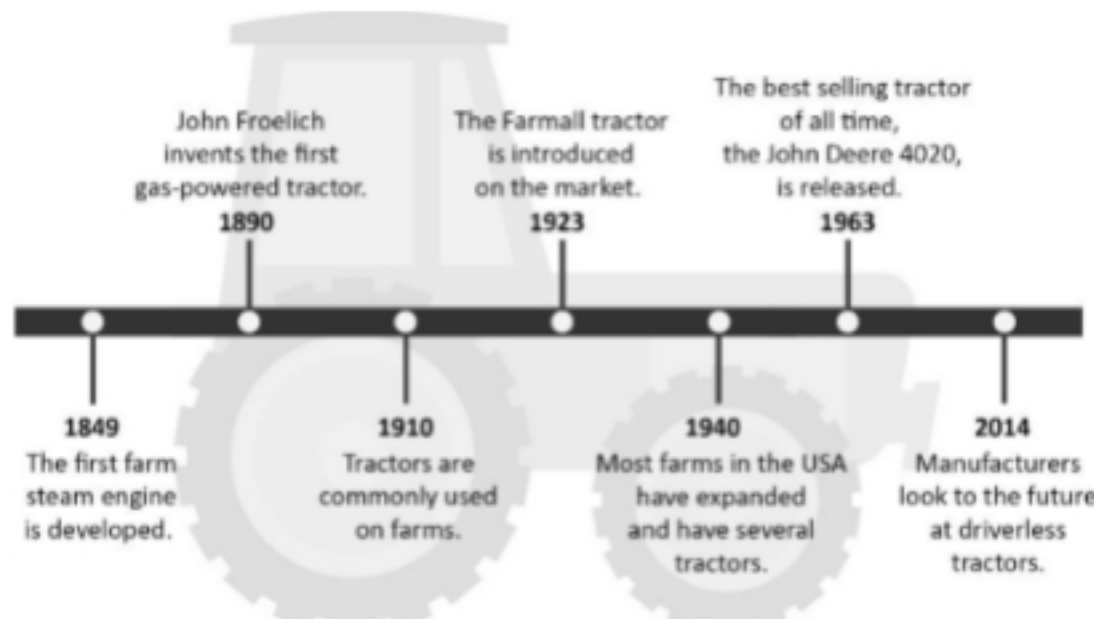
Introduction

The farm tractor is one of the most important inventions in the history of farming. Tractors are machines that provide power for tasks such as plowing, planting, and harvesting crops. The development of the tractor meant more land could be farmed faster and with less human and animal power. It also meant many workers would leave agriculture and move into the manufacturing and service sectors. Tractors are often credited as one of the major reasons the U.S. saw a workforce shift from farms to factories. The tractor is comparable to the automobile in its impact on the economy of the United States. It completely overhauled the farming industry.

The History of the Tractor

Before the tractor as we know it was developed, John Deere first created the steel-walking plow in 1837. A horse would pull this plow, and a farmer would walk behind it. Almost 30 years later, John Deere developed the riding cultivator, a plow with wheels and a seat. It was pulled by an animal and made it possible for the farmer to ride instead of walk behind the plow. The steam engine tractor was developed in the 1880s. It was huge, extremely heavy, and constantly at risk of explosion. It had many obstacles to overcome, many critics, and very few sales.

However, the steam engine was an important step toward the gas-powered tractor that would truly change farming. John Froelich developed the very first gasoline-powered tractor in 1892. This tractor could move forward and backward. Froelich discovered that by using the power of the tractor and connecting it to farm equipment, the work could be done much faster than with a horse. Froelich's tractor was eventually acquired by John Deere, a manufacturer of tractors and farm machinery.



Tractors developed throughout the early 1900s. Henry Ford, the carmaker, produced his first gasoline-powered tractor in 1907. In 1913, the Bull Tractor Company introduced the first tractor for small farms. The Farmall tractor, a light, all-purpose tractor, was produced in 1923. It could work a little over a half of an acre per hour. Due to the increased productivity it could give the farmer, the Farmall was met with enthusiastic customer demand.

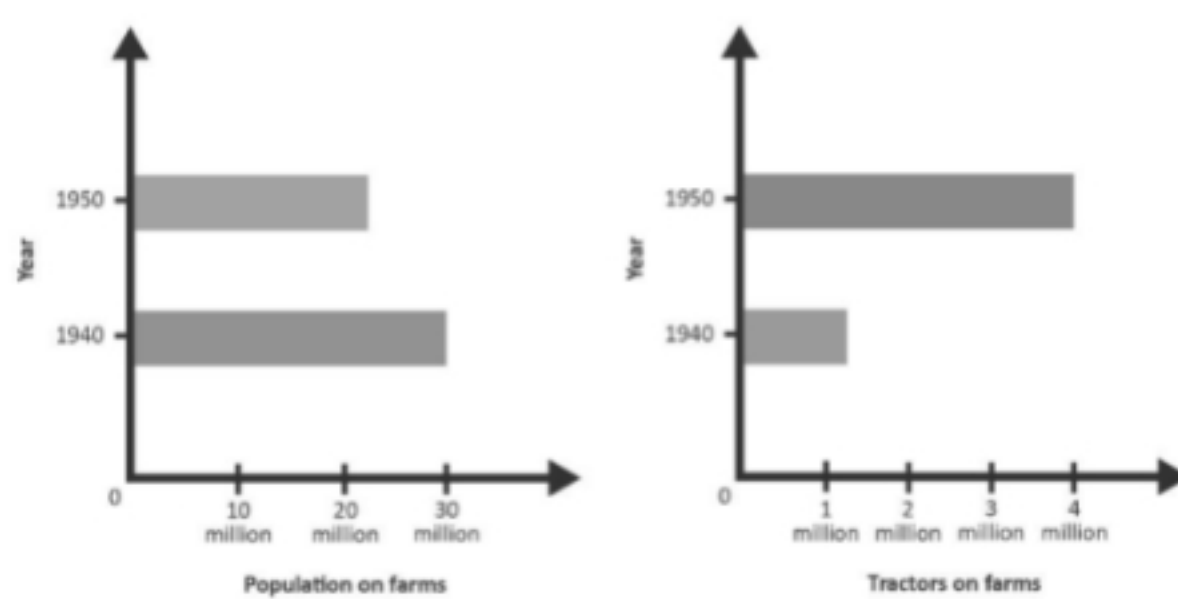
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By 1940, farmers were able to farm much larger areas of land. In 1954, the number of tractors on farms in the United States was greater than the number of horses and mules on farms. In 1966, the John Deere Company exceeded \$1 billion in tractor sales. This increased to \$2 billion by 1973. Even when the United States experienced a farming depression in the late 1970s, John Deere was still making a profit.

Tractors, Then and Now

Tractors were developed to make the task of working the land easier and more productive. Tractors, then and now, made it possible to plant and harvest more crops than a farmer with a horse. They began as simple machines and evolved into high-tech computers on wheels. Froelich's gasoline-powered tractor could work the land at 2 miles per hour. In contrast, today's tractors can work the land at 6 miles per hour. Early steam engine tractors were large and dangerous. Modern tractors range in size for the different jobs they do. They have been designed to keep people and property safe. Early tractors had metal seats and were open to the outdoors. Today's tractors, however, have cushioned seats, closed cabs, air conditioning, and even radio and television!



Over the years, inventors, engineers, and farmers developed products such as rubber tires, special hitches, and GPS to make tractors work even better. The industry is now experimenting with driverless tractors. It would once more streamline farming and cut down on the amount of people needed to work on a farm. A tractor that doesn't require a farmer certainly would make working the land easier and more productive.

The Benefits of Tractor Farming

The most immediate benefit of tractor farming was that more land could be worked in a day. More land worked meant more food could be grown and sold. This meant more money could be earned. A farmer with a plow pulled by a horse could farm one to one and a half acres in a day. In 2015, a tractor that didn't need a driver could drive around the clock, working more than 150 acres in a day.

Additional benefits of tractor farming include reliability, ease of use, job production, and reduced physical demands. Tractors can work longer hours than horses. They do not require breaks or the same level of care that living creatures require. Additionally, someone who knows how to drive a car can learn how to operate a tractor. While tractors have overtaken some jobs, they have also created new jobs. Scientists, engineers, factory workers, tractor mechanics, and salespeople all have jobs because of this industry. Finally, driving a tractor, while still hard work, is less physically demanding than steering a plow and walking behind a horse for miles.

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Although tractors have many costs, they increase productivity and reduce the need for animals and workers. Reduced overhead costs for farmers and increased production have translated into greater availability of foods and lower prices for consumers. This is perhaps the tractor's most important legacy. More availability and affordability of food means less hungry and more healthy people. Tractor farming has made it so food can be more abundant and harvested faster so that consumers get it fresh. Without tractors, we would all have to work much harder to have healthy foods to eat.

These benefits make it clear that the farm tractor's legacy goes beyond the engines they have and the miles they drive.

