

Corn Planter

Horse-drawn planters used a sled-style marker to create a grid on the field. The grid ensured uniform rows, which made cross-cultivation easier, keeping the field weed-free. Two people operated the planter. Parallel lines were etched into the soil on the first pass; lines were then etched at right angles on the second pass. On the third trip, the person sitting on the planter pulled a lever at each intersection, dropping seeds into the furrow. Wide wheel rims tamped the soil as the planter passed.

Check-row planting evolved from the sled era, first using knotted rope and later wire stretched across a field as guides for rows. Check wire ran along one side of the planter when planting in one direction, and on the other side on the return trip. Buttons spaced every 40-42 inches created rows wide enough to allow a horse to pass through when cultivating. When planting was complete, a hand crank was used to wind the wire on the reel.

Although primitive by today's standards, check-row planting represented state-of-the-art technology in its era. According to U.S. Department of Agriculture statistics, it took 35-40 labor hours in 1890 to produce 100 bushels of corn on 2.5 acres. Equipment commonly used then included a 2-bottom gangplow, disc and peg-tooth harrow, and a 2-row planter.