



# BILLINGS FARM & MUSEUM

## DRAFT ANIMAL CELEBRATION: WHAT IS A DRAFT ANIMAL?



**Oxen pulling a hay cart at Billings Farm**

A draft animal is an animal that has been trained to do work – specifically to pull heavy loads. The two most common draft animals are horses and oxen or working steers. On farms, draft animals can be used to plow fields, pull wagons, stone boats, and logs. Farmers have also used them to pull sleds with huge barrels of maple sap for sugaring season in the Northeast. Today, farms rely on tractors to do the work historically done by draft animals. However, there are still teamsters (people who train and drive draft animals) who work with draft animals on their

farms.

Historically, the most common draft animals in Vermont were oxen. Oxen are castrated male cattle who are trained in yoke to pull a multitude of equipment. Oxen tend to move more slowly than horses but have better stamina making them ideal for plowing large fields. Vermont's history of dairy also plays into its loyalty to oxen and steer. Dairy farmers had a steady supply of male calves they could train to work as oxen.

When working with a team of oxen or steers, the teamster is usually walking beside them and using voice commands to control where they go. Teamsters will also use a tool called a goad which looks similar to a long stick. The goad is used to tap the animals as a reinforcement of the vocal commands.



**Amy Deome trains a team of Jersey steers**

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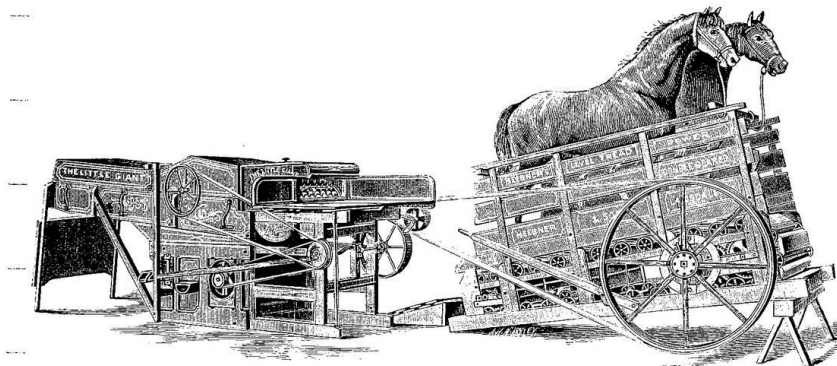
Horses are another very common type draft animal. Horses are faster than oxen and were often used for transportation like pulling wagons and carts. They're also well suited to being used for plowing and other field work with equipment you can ride on. When a teamster is driving a pair of draft horses, they are usually sitting behind them on the equipment and using reins to control where they go.



Max and Banner, Billings Farm's team of Belgian draft horses.

Draft horses were also used to run equipment like threshers that needed a faster-paced animal to power (horsepower) the machine. Some of the most common draft breeds in the U.S. are Belgian, Clydesdale, and Percheron. In the US draft horses were used to pull railroad materials out west while they were being built and many were sent to World War I to carry heavy loads of artillery. At Billings Farm we have three Belgians and two Percherons.

HEEBNERS' "LITTLE GIANT" THRESHER AND CLEANER.



In other parts of the world, water buffalo are used as draft animals. In fact, over 160 million water buffalo are used around the world as working animals. Many work in Asian countries where they help in the production of rice.



A draft Water Buffalo working in a rice field