

# Successful Livestock Marketing

By W. F. Stevens, Livestock Commissioner for Alberta

In a country of "magnificent distances," such as Western Canada is, the problem of marketing livestock is a serious one. It includes the assembling of the animals at the initial point, conveying them to the place of sale, and disposing of them after they arrive there.

In the assembling of stock for shipment, one of two things is necessary; either the animals must all be brought in on one day or the shipper must have private pens for receiving and holding them until a carload has been collected.

It sometimes happens that a shipper who has enjoyed a monopoly of the business at a given point, has made a practice of using the shipping pens for collecting and holding, and when farmers who wish to ship on their own account, or two or more farmers who wish to ship co-operatively, arrive they find the pens occupied and the regular shipper, who, because of long usage, has begun to feel that he has a right to use the pens in that way, refuses to vacate. In many cases the station agent is friendly to his cause and the farmer is put to a good deal of trouble and sometimes expense before he is able to get the use of the facilities the company has provided; and sometimes, because of the combined opposition of the regular shipper and the station agent, the farmer has been compelled to load across the grain loading platform.

It is a good practice when ordering a car for the shipment of livestock to make sure that a sufficient number of shipping pens will be available when required. If the pens are being used improperly by another shipper who refuses to vacate, the farmer will have time to get the matter adjusted thru the Superintendent's office before the day of shipment arrives.

At most places the shipping accommodations are fairly good. Shelter sheds are, however, badly needed at many points, particularly for hogs. About five years ago an inspector of the Board of Railway Commissioners recommended that shelter sheds be provided, but there were no specifications as to dimensions, etc. He doubtless assumed that the railway companies would build in proportion to the trade. In some cases they did, but altho the trade at many of these places has quadrupled, there has been no enlarging of the shelter sheds. In other cases the shelter never was adequate.

## The Problem of Transportation

Most of the difficulties connected with transportation have been removed during the past seven or eight years. Prior to that time the bulk of the shipments were in train load lots either by ranchers, whose yearly output consisted of from one to three, or even four trainloads, or by buyers who, knowing the difficulty connected with getting small consignments over the road, shipped only in train load lots.

There were, and still are, natural reasons why one and two car consignments cannot be moved with the same rapidity as can a train load shipment, but there is an abundance of evidence that even railway officials viewed with disfavor the gradual decline in the number of these large shipments and the ever increasing number of small ones, and this disfavor was manifested by an indifference toward, and sometimes a contempt for, the small shipper that could not be mistaken. The indifference of the superior degenerated into hostility in his inferiors, and as the underlings were the persons with whom the small shipper came in contact, his experiences were often anything but pleasant. The large shipper knew the way to the superintendent's office, and the door was usually opened to him when he arrived there. This the minor employee knew, and he conducted himself accordingly; besides, that "fellow feeling that makes us wondrous kind" which grew up among the large shippers and the higher railway officials did much to facilitate the operations of the big dealer, a fact that did not escape the notice of the man who operated in a small way.

Most of the difficulties have disappeared as have most of those who shipped in train load lots. The small shipper is in the majority now. A large number of them have learned the way to the super-

Diversified farming is the only permanent system of agriculture. The keeping of livestock is the basis of such a system. There are several more or less serious obstacles which tend to discourage the Western farmer from keeping livestock and one of the most important of these is ignorance regarding the question of markets. In this article W. F. Stevens, Livestock Commissioner, Department of Agriculture, Edmonton, Alberta, thoroughly discusses Western marketing conditions and the information it contains should be read and carefully considered by every farmer.

intendent's office, and they are usually treated with consideration, if not with courtesy.

Naturally, causes of complaint arise, but those that are reported to my office are mild as compared with those that were received five or six years ago. During the past two years no complaints have come to my office which, upon investigation, left anything chargeable against the higher officials further than that having got things to running smoothly they relaxed their vigilance, and the trainmen, agents and operators, finding that their movements were not being observed, grew careless and sometimes worse. In many cases the shipper's difficulty was due to some trainmen or agent waiting for a tip.

## Tipping

A great many of the difficulties connected with the movement of livestock are due to the practice which certain shippers have of tipping the train crews. In most cases it follows that, in order to grant the favor for which the tip was given, the train crew fail to render to

that they needed rest, and then proceeded to spend the time at a St. Patrick's Day ball. The fact that several shippers had loaded their stock in anticipation of the train arriving as per schedule, and that their stock were shrinking at the rate of about \$3.00 per car per hour, was apparently a matter of small consequence.

There is a need of definite information. In order to secure efficient service it is necessary that the shipper know the service to which he is entitled. The man who insists upon things that the trainmen know he cannot get when he complains to the man higher up, reduces his chance of getting what he is really entitled to.

## Shipping Regulations

About two years ago I was able, with the assistance of E. J. Fream, then secretary of the United Farmers of Alberta, and of the Alberta Livestock Association, to put thru a set of regulations governing shipments of livestock. These regulations apply West of Winnipeg. A copy of same will be sent to



For successful marketing, uniform, high grade livestock must be produced

some other shipper the service to which he is entitled, and they impair their usefulness to the company as well. I once watched a crew work for nearly an hour with a train load of exhibition stock picking out the cars of shippers who had given them tips in order to get their cars spotted first for unloading. While it doubtless paid these exhibitors to do it, they were getting something that really belonged to someone else, and the trainmen used an hour of time for which they were being paid by the company and for which they rendered the company no service whatever.

One of the most useless things a shipper can do is to quarrel with the train crews and station agents who are not giving him the service to which he thinks he is entitled. A telegram to the district freight agent or divisional superintendent would be much more effective, and if that fails to bring results, then to the secretary of the Board of Railway Commissioners at Ottawa.

Sometimes a train crew makes a wrong use of a good regulation that was adopted on their behalf, and the company is discommoded as badly as the shipper, yet is unable to protect itself. This occurred a few weeks ago when a train crew delayed a train six hours by claiming

any address on application to the Department of Agriculture, Edmonton.

A phase of the problem of marketing livestock to which more attention is being paid than formerly is that of disposing of the animals after they have arrived at the point of destination. Recent events have focussed attention to this point. The Prairie Provinces had by July 1, 1914, become well stocked with hogs. Owing to the drought of that year the swine growers of the districts affected found themselves with a large number of pigs on hand and little or no grain to feed them. The war made grain prices high, consequently many of those who had grain did not have the heart to feed it. This resulted in a large number of animals going to market early which, under normal conditions, would not have gone within from one to six months, and as a consequence the percentage of unfinished animals was greatly in excess of those that were really fit for slaughter. Naturally prices had to go down, and the prices of the poorest went lowest; whether or not they went lower than they should, I am not in a position to say. The general opinion is that they did. Certain it is that the conditions were right for such a thing to occur, and the farmers, adopting the course of reasoning pursued

by the Irishman who said "Would a duck swim if there was water about? I don't know," decided that the packers had improved the opportunity. The result was that a clamor went up from two sources; the one from the packing interests, who urged that a campaign of education be started at once to prevent farmers from selling off their livestock, especially hogs; the other from the farmers, who insisted that the country is in need of more packers. Both sides appeared to think that it was the duty of the government to interfere and save the situation.

## Government Intervention

Indirectly governments can do much, and should do all in their power to educate farmers in the best methods of production and to assist them in securing a fair price for what they have to sell. In a new country where settlement is sparse and the means of communication slow, governments can well afford to go as far in this direction as is consistent with sound principles. Just how far that is is an unsettled question. Expressing my personal views on the subject, I would say that a government's duty in keeping the channels of trade free from artificial obstructions is similar to that of a city in controlling traffic in a congested district. If the lives and property of those who use push carts are jeopardized by those who use motor trucks, it is the duty of the city to adopt regulations intended to control the drivers of motor trucks. When conditions become such that these cannot be controlled without endless prosecutions and investigations and without seriously embarrassing all the traffic, it is the duty of the city to go a step further. That step should not be in abolishing the motor truck, nor in the direction of the city going into the cartage business, but in providing a suitable thoroughfare for the exclusive use of those who use push carts.

## Dry Refrigeration

About thirty years ago an invention was made which gave those concerns that were in a position to use it, an advantage over the ones that were not, similar to that of the owner of the motor truck over the man with the push cart. This invention was "dry refrigeration." By means of it meat could be kept sweet in the heat of summer for a period of six weeks without freezing it, and, when frozen, it could be kept indefinitely. The man who relied on wet or ice refrigeration was obliged to salt everything at the end of a week or at the most ten days.

Since the day of this invention and its application to the preservation of meats there has been a gradual absorption of the meat business by a few large concerns, and a like gradual elimination of the small dealer. This process was accelerated by the greater returns that a large concern can secure for its by-products (such as blood, bones and viscera) than is possible by the man who is operating in a small way. Inspection likewise contributed to the same end. Because of the lack of inspection, small dealers were unable to carry on an inter-provincial trade, and even the best of the local city trade went to those shops that could show the government inspector's stamp. The result was that the retailer was forced to buy of the man who operated in a sufficiently large way to secure the installation of an inspector at his plant or go out of business.

The collecting of the meat business of the country into the hands of a few large concerns is of itself not an evil. It is the opportunity which large capital and limited numbers afford for "getting together" that causes them to be dis-trusted and charged—rightly or wrongly—with taking an unfair advantage of their opportunity whenever supplies are in excess of immediate requirements.

The question then arises:—What is necessary to meet the situation and what can governments do?

Speaking personally, and in no wise involving or expressing the attitude of the department to which I am attached, I may say that two courses are open to the government that desires to inter-

Continued on Page 34