

PRODUCTION OF FIRM BACON.

From what has been said, it will be seen that softness may result from a number of causes; and it is possible that there are causes outside of those mentioned. Enough has been said, however, to place the feeder on his guard against the most common causes; and below are offered a few suggestions regarding methods of feeding, and management which we have found to give good results.

Feeding. As already stated, exclusive meal feeding is apt to injure the quality of bacon. We have also found that it does not give so economical gains as a mixed diet. Among the foods which we have used along with meal, are skim-milk, whey, roots, rape, vetches, and clover. We have found that these foods, combined with a liberal meal ration, invariably give better gains than an exclusively meal ration, and produce a better quality of bacon. It is probable that much of the beneficial influence of these foods is due to the fact that they help to keep the animals healthy and thrifty, a condition necessary to the production of the best quality of bacon.

But while these succulent foods have an important place in hog feeding, they may also be abused. If an attempt is made to feed hogs almost exclusively upon them, the chances are that the hogs will not be properly finished, and soft bacon will likely result. The use of various foods will be found more fully discussed under "Notes on Foodstuffs."

Exercise. In our experiments, we have found that unlimited exercise during the fattening period is not conducive to cheap production. At the same time, the exercise has a good effect upon the firmness of the bacon produced. We have secured our cheapest gains, and an excellent quality of bacon from allowing the hogs only a limited amount of exercise in small outside yards adjacent to the pens, and feeding a limited ration of mixed meal accompanied with all the green food they will eat. By a limited meal ration, is meant an allowance slightly less than the hogs will eat if given the opportunity. We have found this method more economical than feeding meal on pasture, though it requires more labor. It is a notable fact, however, that hogs which have run at large until they weigh 100 pounds in thin condition, may be finished on almost any meal mixture and still produce firm bacon. This fact illustrates the marked influence of exercise upon firmness of bacon.

NOTES ON FOODSTUFFS.

It will invariably be found that a mixture of foods gives better results than a single kind. In the notes which follow, some of the principal pig foods are briefly discussed, and suggestions given regarding their combination with other foods.

Peas. Whole peas are very palatable, but entirely too wasteful, as the hogs do not digest them thoroughly. Pea meal is a valuable food, but should never be fed alone. The heavy, close nature of the meal renders it difficult to digest, and the pigs are very apt to sicken. It combines well with barley, or barley and wheat middlings. A few well ground oats may also be added. Peas are noted for the excellent quality of bacon which they produce.

Barley. This is a noted hog food in Europe; but some feeders in this country do not look upon it with favor. We have secured excellent results from barley, however, both in the amount of gain and the quality of bacon. For young pigs it should be mixed with wheat middlings, a very little barley being used at first, and the quantity gradually increased. For older pigs, peas or wheat may be added. Some succulent food, such as roots or green food, should always be fed with it; and skim-milk makes a great improvement. It is not generally regarded with favor as a food for breeding sows.