

CONDITIONS IN THE COW COUNTRY

It has always seemed to me that with respect to the interests of the farmers who are isolated contributors to the stores of the world, the ordinary commercial papers give little attention to stock-taking over the whole field of this industry. Every other producing and distributing interest, particularly that of a town or city, has its day-to-day editorial analysis of conditions and its expert forecast. It is a blessing that our agricultural journalism in Canada is of outstanding merit but our agricultural papers are perhaps not appreciated and supported as they should be. Their stock-taking is generally worth while and it should be taken advantage of to a greater extent than it is.

From an Alberta stand-point the stock-taking that seems to be of greatest present importance is that relating to the condition of the beef industry. The changes that have been taking place in the character of beef production, and a feeling that the production interest has not been getting its due, are the causes that impel to a study of the question.

There has been a feeling current among superficial observers that the "passing of the range", which is a term that has become rather fashionable, meant the same thing as the "passing of the steer." \*If this were the case we might save the time and energy involved in an analysis of the subject, leave it as a dead issue and turn to a more live theme. But this is not the case. A glance at the volume of beef exports from the Province over the past six years shows that the contrary is the case. As the returns cannot be given accurately for the Province before inauguration two years ago, the figures given for 1901-2-3 and 4 must be regarded as approximate rather than absolute. In 1904 the exports of beef from Alberta were about 86 per cent. of the exports from the whole of the Territories and if the same proposition held for the three previous years the figures would be about as follows for the six years: For 1905 and 6 the figures are taken from the stock inspection records of the Province and may be regarded as correct.

1901	34,196
1902	51,643
1903	33,398
1904	42,330
1905	54,464
1906	80,358

The exports from the whole of the Territories in 1901 were only 39,763, by which it will be seen that the exports for Alberta now are a little over twice what they were for the whole of the Territories six years ago and are two and a third times what they were for our own Province at that time. The production for home consumption has probably increased in at least the same proportion. Incidentally it is worth noticing what our growth in a general way has been when we recollect the progress in grain, forage and root growing that has gone on during the same time and which is probably proportionately much larger than it is in reference to beef-growing.

From a study of figures showing the output at different points, it appears that most of the output is from points including Calgary and south of Calgary to the extent of perhaps 90 per cent. This probably does not represent the proportionate production in the lower part and more dense population in the centre and north; the amount required for home production is much greater in the latter than in the former section. Though the exports north of Calgary are relatively small it is worth noting that the number exported in 1906 is twice as large as in 1905, which shows the growth of a desirable tendency to produce more export beef in the mixed farming area, the number being 7,663 in one case and 3 776 in the other.

It will appear from this that the beef problem is practically the range problem, if we may still be permitted to use the term for the country which in the past has been the centre of the pastoral industry. Medicine Hat is the largest individual shipping point with 11,567 in 1905 and 11,531 in 1906, which is the highest total for two years combined. The recent inquiry by the beef commission inaugurated by the

Alberta Government must be presumed to have been prompted by the existence of a feeling of dissatisfaction with returns from the beef industry in the southern part of the province.

A study of the methods of production and marketing of this stock must be undertaken in order to explain the conditions. It is the case that the bulk of the stock is marketed during four or five months in the year. Shipping generally begins early in July—it was later this year—and continues until about the end of November, with a few later than this and a number of light shipments scattered over the winter months. It will appear from this that the exported cattle are grass cattle and that feeding to finish is so far from general that it may be considered on the contrary as exceptional. No doubt feeding for ordinary sustenance and the providing of some shelter are more general to guard against actual loss, but our beef production is still a grazing rather than a feeding proposition.

This method has obvious disadvantages. In the first place the failure to distribute the supply over the year makes it impossible for the producer to get the advantage of the best market in the old country—particularly the spring market—and also puts him into the position of one who has to sell as respects the middleman. The distance from the market, of course, is very long and makes it necessary for the dealer to buy at a safe margin as the British market is a very sensitive and fluctuating one. This probably cannot be remedied or avoided.

The neglect of feeding has another important disadvantage. It lowers the proportion of export stuff and leaves a glut of light grade stuff for home consumption. This is an important matter as it is estimated that 50 per cent. of our beef is used for local consumption. If half of this residue were raised to export quality it would raise the whole of our output to export price and not leave the small producer of fair butcher's cattle at the mercy of the local buyer.

The shipping of range cattle is wasteful in the



THE ULTIMATE SALVATION OF EVERY FARM.