

Italian Cattle

Marchigiana cattle, a breed first imported from Italy in 1973, are doing well in Alberta, according to Ben Schrader who is breeding them on a ranch at Westlock some fifty miles north of Edmonton.

The Marchigiana, one of Italy's five white cattle breeds, accounts for about forty-five per cent of beef cattle raised in Italy. The breed's strong points are its easy calving (even when cross bred) gentleness and adaptability.

Mr. Schrader commented, "One of the real highlights, particularly for me, is their hardiness. They've done extremely well over here in winter."

Canada first opened its doors to the importation of Italian beef breeds in the early 1970s. The first to be imported were of another white Italian breed, the Chianina, followed by the Romagnola. The Marchigiana came third "not because they're inferior, but because it was just the way it happened," says Mr. Schrader.

Computer Patients

Fourth-year medical students at the University of Alberta in Edmonton were faced with a new kind of test this year in which their patients could die if they made a mistake in treatment. The "patients" were simulated cases fed into a computer, including an emergency road accident case, a thyroid problem, an eight-month old baby with meningitis and an obstetrical case.

A television screen gave the patient's symptoms, family history and vital information. The student, using a light-sensitive pen, was required to choose between various treatment options and monitor the patient's condition. If a student selected the wrong treatment or sat too long at the terminal, the patient could "die".

Wayne Osbaldeston, the programme analyst, commented afterwards that 90 per cent of students said they enjoyed the exam. Some suffered anxiety and at least one student was unable to cope with the pressure, "but these are the kind of people we want to watch out for."

After such a test, the computer provides the examiners with a print-out of the student's performance, including the number of correct responses he made. The patient's "death" doesn't necessarily spell failure for the student, because correct treatment may have been administered to a certain point. Moreover, the exam accounts for only 20 per cent of the student's written work.

Computers have been used before for simple multiple-choice tests, but "computer patients" are a new concept in testing students, according to the examination and research centre of Canada's Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons.

Economic Digest

Cost of living

The cost of living in Canada rose sharply in October mainly because of higher prices for shelter and food, Statistics Canada reported at mid-November. The Consumer Price Index rose nine-tenths of one per cent in October. This followed a moderate September rise of two-tenths of one per cent, which had broken a chain of successive sharp monthly rises during the summer.

About one-half the October living costs rise occurred because shelter costs were higher. An average 13 per cent rise in annual residential property taxes (rates) was the main reason.

But in addition, food prices started to move up again after some declines in September. Beef and pork prices were higher as were prices for fresh vegetables, coffee, canned salmon and restaurant meals.

Unemployment

Statistics showing the Canadian unemployment rate in October remained at the highest level in 14 years were issued at mid-November.

Statistics Canada reported that 7.2 per cent of the work force were without jobs in October, the same percentage rate as September.

However, there were increases in rates in New Brunswick, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, Manitoba and Saskatchewan. Rates were unchanged in Ontario and Alberta and down elsewhere.

It was the eighth consecutive month the national rate has hovered above seven per cent, the highest level since July, 1961, when it also was 7.2 per cent. The figures are adjusted to account for seasonal variation.

On an actual basis, 576,000 persons were officially unemployed in October.

The jobless rate for those 24 and younger increased four-tenths of one percentage point to 12.9 per cent. Unemployment dropped by almost as much, however, for those aged 25 and older. The October rate for men was 4.9 per cent while the women's rate was 4.2 per cent.

Among the increases for the five provinces, the sharpest jump was recorded in New Brunswick, where the rate rose by 2.2 per cent to 12.6 per cent. Newfoundland retained the highest jobless level in the country at 19.6 per cent, up from 18.8 per cent in September.

Rates remained steady in Alberta at 3.4 per cent — the lowest level in the country — and in Ontario at 5.8 per cent of the labour force. The British Columbia rate dropped one percentage point to 8.6 per cent, in part because of provincial government legislation in October ending strikes that had caused widespread layoffs in the forest industry. The Quebec rate declined to 9.1 per cent from 9.3 per cent. The Saskatchewan rate jumped 1.6 percentage points to 3.5 per cent, Manitoba was up one-half of a percentage point to four per cent and the Nova Scotia rate increased to 8.5 per cent from 8.1 per cent.

Sexless credit

Government action is being taken in two Canadian provinces to ensure equal credit rights for women.

The Ontario provincial government is following the initiative last spring of the British Columbia government in this field. Ontario hopes to remove sex as a credit consideration through introduction of broad guidelines intended to ensure women have equal access to mortgages and other forms of credit.

Neither the British Columbia nor Ontario governments is guaranteeing women credit rights as a matter of law. But spokesmen for government and credit granting industries say they believe this is an adequate way of achieving the end desired. The aim is that sex should be used neither as a criterion for determining credit-worthiness nor for influencing the terms of credit offered.

Women now form 34.4 per cent of Canada's total work force, and 62 per cent of them are married. Enough complaints about credit discrimination on the basis of sex have been received to anticipate that other provincial governments will eventually follow suit.

Skiboom

Canada's ski industry is anticipating one of its best seasons in several years, buoyed by the boom in cross country skiing, according to Chuck Roberts, President of the National Ski Industries Association (NSIA).

The association reports that annual retail sales of ski equipment and clothing in Canada exceeds C\$100M. A fitness conscious public is turning to cross country skiing because it offers several inexpensive outdoor exercises. Cross country equipment sales have trebled in the last two years and now surpass sales of down hill gear four to one.