

Co-operating at Crossfield

A Square Deal for the Farmers and for the Local Merchants is the Co-operative Company's Aim

By R. D. Colquette

"Commercial travellers 'll tell you that we've got the liveliest little town on the line." I had heard the same remark in half a dozen other towns in Alberta, and so was not surprised to hear it from the good burghers of Crossfield. They are shrewd men, these knights of the grip. A good working knowledge of human nature is an important part of their stock-in-trade. I would hesitate to venture an opinion as to which is the "liveliest town on the line," but I have no hesitation in saying that a live town is generally surrounded by live farmers. In these days live farmers are generally found co-operating, and their co-operative enterprises do not seem to hurt their town any. You would think to hear some men talking that as soon as the farmers got to co-operating, grass would grow in the streets, and the stores, hotels and houses, deserted, would fall into ruin and decay. Then the farmers, deprived of the local demand for their surplus chickens and garden sars, would go back to Ontario or the States, and the prairie would revert to sage brush and buffalo. No danger. Some of the liveliest little towns on the prairie have mighty live co-operative enterprises. Readjusting its business on a more satisfactory basis doesn't kill a town. It gives it a new lease of life. And so Crossfield still claims to be the liveliest little town on the line, though there is a Crossfield Co-operative Association that is doing very nicely, thank you.

Getting Away to a New Start

The Crossfield-U.F.A. Co-operative Association has not pursued its business career without encountering difficulties. Some months ago its affairs were not in a satisfactory condition. But the directors did not throw up the sponge and say that the farmers couldn't

company like the co-operative to protect their interests. This is what we are endeavoring to do.

In arranging for shipments through the company most of the business is done over the telephone. Farmers phone in telling how many hogs they have for delivery that week. Thursday is the regular shipping day, and if more hogs are promised than is necessary to fill a car, another one is ordered. As many as four carloads have been shipped in one week. On the arrival of the hogs they are weighed over the company's scale, which is located at the stockyards. Here also the hogs are cut into the various grades. If the grading is unsatisfactory, it would be an easy matter to mark the hogs under dispute to see how they grade at the Calgary yards, to which shipments are consigned. No difficulty, however, has arisen, as it has been found that the grading at Crossfield and Calgary always tallies. With cattle the brands serve to identify each man's stuff when it reaches the stockyards. Provision is made for feeding and watering hogs in the yard until shipping time. At first they are fed dry chop and water and just before shipment they are given all the wet chop they will eat. The weight at Calgary is taken and the shrinkage divided amongst the shippers in proportion to the weight of the hogs as passing over the company's scales. Expenses for feed, freight, yardage at Calgary and such items are divided in the same manner. Freight amounts to seven cents per hundred.

Hogs Killed to Toronto

The company prefers shipping to the open market where they accept bids from any firm and take the highest offer. Eastern buyers have then a chance to bid for the hogs, and quite a number of them are re-loaded and shipped to Toronto. To meet this condition, the practice is to kill hogs right through from Crossfield to Toronto. They are shipped to Calgary and unloaded, but a commission firm can use the killing if the hogs go east and a rebate is secured on the transit charges from Crossfield to Calgary. The farmers know that they will receive the highest market prices paid on the day that their hogs arrive on the market. As Mr. Casey put it, there is no "beefing" about it. One of the directors is generally going to the city and he accompanies the shipment and sees that everything goes all right. The money is brought back and the expenses deducted. A commission of one per cent. is also deducted for handling the hogs for U.F.A. members and of two per cent. for non-members. The balance can be drawn by the farmer at any time. In many cases it is left with the association for a considerable time or until supplies are required. This assists the association in its financing. Every man is given the privilege of examining the files to see that he is getting a square deal. The substantial service that the company can render farmers was well illustrated last fall when they were getting 75 cents per cwt. more for hogs in Crossfield than was being paid at points in the south of the province.

Many Lines of Supplies Handled

The Crossfield association is now doing a good business handling supplies. This work was first started by the local branches of the U.F.A. in the country served by Crossfield. Formerly when a carload of supplies arrived each man was supposed to come in and get what he had ordered. Some of the members lived 16 miles out of town and this method did not render them the service that it was felt they should have. At that time they did not need a manager, but got a man to devote part of his time to handling the business. Later, as business grew, it took a man's full time and then two men were kept busy. The farmers began feeling the need of capital to conduct the business, and so they formed a trading association, had it incorporated and secured a warehouse. Supplies are kept in stock, and now when members from a distance come in they can secure what they want in the lines handled. These include

posts, lumber, wire, rock salt, sugar, oils, coal, flour and feed, nails, building paper, harness and such commodities. One thing I noticed was a shipment of maple syrup in gallon cans. All the twine in the district for the last two or three years has been handled by the company. Hay is disposed of on a commission basis, quotations being secured and carloads shipped



Direct from the Farmer's Wagon to the Company's Scale.

out. Last fall a car and a half of potatoes were shipped. An agency for insurance is also operated.

A large percentage of the supplies have been purchased through the supply department of the Alberta Co-operative Elevator Company at Calgary. The directors have been looking forward to the time when the United Grain Growers would get under way and supply them with everything they want. They will not now have to knuckle down to some of the little wholesalers, many of whom are doing all in their power to discourage co-operative enterprises among farmers.

Lists and Prices of Commodities Posted

In the warehouse of the company is a simple device that might be installed to advantage by any co-operative company that has not already got one. This is a blackboard on which is kept a list of all the goods handled with the latest quotations. The device was, I was told, suggested by the following incident. A regular patron of the company saw another with some goods on his wagon that he had been wanting. "Where did you get them?" he asked. "At the co-op," was the reply. "I didn't know they kept that," remarked the first man. Now when a man steps into the warehouse he can see exactly what goods are handled and the current prices. The company owns two sets of scales, one at the stockyards and one at the office. It also has a portable elevator, which any member may use without charge. Crossfield is not surrounded by a grain growing district and the Alberta Co-operative Elevator Company has no elevator at this point.

The Organization of the Association

The association is organized in the ordinary way, with an authorized capital of \$10,000 divided into shares of \$10 each. A shareholder may take as many shares as he wishes. The by-laws, which are modeled after those suggested by the Alberta Co-operative Elevator Company, call for three, five or seven directors. The association, however, has nine directors, one for each outside local. This makes for a better feeling toward the company, as all have then a representative on the directorate. It appears that the legality of having nine directors has been questioned

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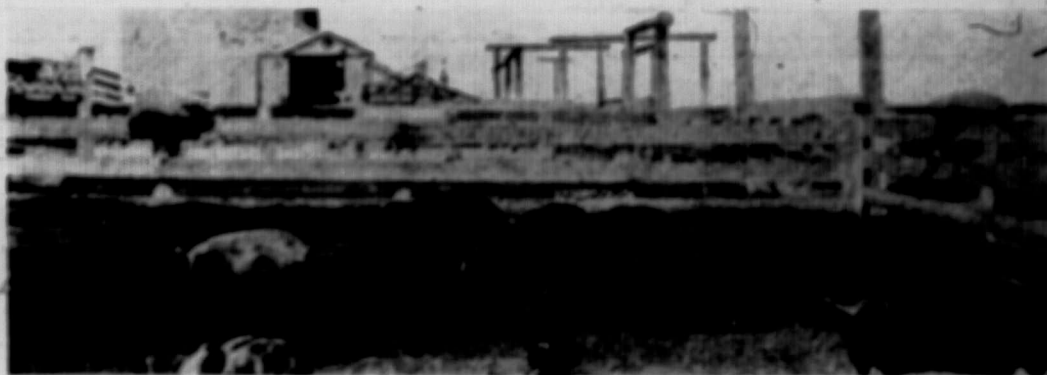


The Office and Warehouse of the Crossfield Co-operative Association. Manager Smith is standing in the doorway.

co-operate anyway; that they might as well give up the struggle. "We advertised for a new manager," said President Casey, who happened to be in the office on the morning of my visit. "Out of the 30 or 40 applications we selected the present secretary and manager, E. D. Smith, and since then the affairs of the company have been straightened out and now business is very satisfactory. The livestock shipments are an indication of how satisfactory business has been. In March they were \$13,929.77, in April \$13,071.24, in May \$9,653.93 and in June \$17,532.32. Besides this the company does a good business in the comparatively full line of supplies which it handles. Small stuff is not stocked, as the directors do not want to hurt the local merchants. The company confines its operations to things that can be handled quickly and that will save the farmers some money, the chief object being to regulate prices and see that the farmers get a square deal.

The Livestock End.

I was fortunate in happening in on the Crossfield company on shipping day and was able to secure some photos that show how livestock is being handled. Hogs were coming in rapidly. "We first started in the livestock game in order to help the small shippers," said Mr. Casey. "There are a few men in the district, perhaps half a dozen, who produce hogs in sufficient numbers that they can ship separately. They, of course, are able to look after their own interests. For the small growers, however, a need was felt for a



Ready for shipment to Calgary—Hogs in the Yards at Crossfield, Alta.—Handled by the Crossfield Co-operative Company.