

# The Farmer's Advocate

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### EDITORIAL.

#### CONSIDERATIONS FOR SHORTHORN BREEDERS.

Elsewhere in this issue is a letter by "Homecroft," containing some timely suggestions for Canadian Shorthorn breeders. It omits to mention, however, the most important and far-reaching question that should engage the attention of the next annual meeting of the Dominion Shorthorn Breeders' Association, viz., the inauguration of a system of official testing of milking Shorthorns, and the publication, in the form of an appendix to the herdbook, of a Record of Performance of officially-tested Shorthorn cows. Some such action is imperative if the breeders of the red, white and roans are to make any considerable progress towards ultimately regaining the ground that they have been losing to the dairy breeds year by year. The Shorthorn cow, as we have her in Canada, is no longer, in any profitable sense, a dual-purpose animal, save only in the case of a few individuals or a few herds where the milking tendency is still sought; and the breed as a whole will never again be entitled to this designation until a radical and systematic effort is made to re-establish in it the milking quality which generations of selection, breeding and feeding according to an all-beef ideal have seriously impaired. The Dominion Shorthorn Breeders' Association, at their last annual meeting, passed an academic resolution, reaffirming the dual-purpose attributes of their breed. But the Canadian public are past the stage of taking stock in bald resolutions of that kind.

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Is the dual-purpose ideal a feasible one? For answer, hark back to the past. Almost every aged or middle-aged reader can recall the Shorthorn cows we used to have, with their broad backs, and deep, level quarters, which fleshed up into excellent beef form when dry, but milked down when fresh, rivalling the dairy breeds in performance at the pail. These old-fashioned dairy matrons were hardy, comparatively free from teat and udder troubles, and good honest workers, yielding liberal returns, while milking and drying off in time to develop a good thrifty calf after their own stamp. Even to-day, the English Shorthorn commonly stands at the head in milking contests at the London, Eng., Dairy Show. There is an immense amount of balderdash written about the great contrast of beef and dairy types, and the alleged incompatibility of beef and dairy tendencies. The "type" is more a matter of condition than of conformation, and such difference as there is in the skeletons of the two types is enormously exaggerated in the show-ring by our custom of exhibiting the dairy breeds in spare flesh and the beef breeds in gross condition. We have seen well-bred Herefords or Shorthorns in thin condition that looked surprisingly like dairy cows, while Holsteins and Ayrshires in high flesh approach surprisingly near the beef-breeder's ideal outline. To be sure, there is some difference in the skeletons of beef and dairy breeds, but not nearly so much as generally imagined, while there is no such inseparable connection between type and tendency as faddists would have us believe. Such relation as does seem to exist is, perhaps, as much a matter of coincidence as of cause and effect. The real essentials of beef and dairy types are not very radically dissimilar, except that the dairyman places stress upon the udder, and the beef breeder on the arch of rib. Between these two characteristics there is nothing more incompatible than the difficulty of combining any other two excellencies in one and the same individual. As for tendency, that

is a matter of breeding, selection and development; and, while it is true that the modern beef breeds have been developed with a view to beefing proclivities only, and their milking function has consequently been lessened, that is no reason whatever on which to base an opinion that the dual function is impracticable. It was not impossible in the old days; it is not in these times, if we strive for it. It has simply declined under a system of all-beef breeding, selection and management. Are we to surrender because the achievement is difficult?

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In the undoing of the Shorthorn (speaking from the average farmer's point of view), the show-ring has played a large part. The dual-purpose standard is not, never has been, and never will be, a favorite with show-ring judges. If the special-purpose dairy cow is difficult to judge according to her intrinsic dairy value, much more difficult is it to judge a class in which the discernment of dairy quality is complicated by regard for beefing propensities. The show-ring is not a good means of developing a dual-purpose breed. Partly for this reason, and partly because the Shorthorn men were ambitious to rival the other beef breeds from a block standpoint, the all-beef ideal began to assert itself in the show-ring, which rapidly established the beef type as the summum bonum of Shorthorn excellence. And the breeders were nothing loath. It relieved them from the necessity of milking their cows. Letting the calves suck their dams for two or three months, and, after that, a number of nurse cows kept for the purpose, did away with the work of milking, was less of a tax upon the cows, permitting them to gain flesh for another show season, and resulted in the production of thriftier, fatter bull and heifer calves, which sold for enhanced prices to unsuspecting buyers; for the Ontario farmer bearing in mind the dual-purpose proclivities of the breed to which he had grown accustomed, continued to purchase these fat young bulls to use on his dairy herd, never guessing that he was buying sires that would in all probability lessen the milking propensity of his next generation of cows. This kind of thing went on for one decade after another, the farmer buying these beef-bred bulls on the strength of the breed's past reputation for milking quality, and paying a fancy price for the young bull, because, as an individual, he was of smooth, thick, low-set type, and heavily fleshed. Meantime, the milking propensity in the farm herds steadily decreased, but the farmer, wedded to his old breed, went back to the breeder again and again, ever hoping for better luck next time. So long as he kept coming back, the breeder was gratified, and assured himself complacently that he had been wise in going in for the all-beef type. But all down-grade paths lead to the bottom. Utility is the ultimate arbiter of every bovine fate.

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At last the Canadian farmer awoke to the fact that the modern Shorthorn was not the Shorthorn of old. It no longer answered his purpose. It failed in the udder end, which was to him of far more commercial importance than the back. He gradually forsook his old love and went in for the dairy breeds, and to-day congratulates himself on having made the change, while the Shorthorn breeder rubs his eyes and wonders where his trade has gone. What is to be done about it? There is some little talk of awarding special prizes for dairy Shorthorns at the fairs, but what is the good of that, when there are few or none to exhibit, especially seeing that the dual-purpose strain can never be satisfactorily judged by show-ring standards? Such talk as we have heard

about offering special prizes for milking Shorthorns is like trying to check a whirlwind with a handful of chaff. There is some talk of importing English dairy Shorthorns, either to supply a special trade or to fuse with our present herds, or to do both; but what is the use of that, unless we provide for the systematic perpetuation of the qualities for which we seek these strains? The arbitrament of the show-yard, combined with the irrational system of selection, breeding and management which we have been following would as surely destroy the dual-purpose quality of the new importations as it did of the original stock. Our ideals are wrong. Our system of determining values by the show-ring standard is wrong. Our herd management is wrong. We must change these, and then, by making provision for the systematic registration in a record of performance of the good-milking Shorthorn cows and their progeny, it will be perfectly feasible, working from the foundation we have, reinforced, perhaps, by a few importations of English Shorthorns, to develop within the breed a strain of registered cattle that will be dual-purpose in fact as well as in name; cows that will combine with the cardinal essentials of beef form the deep-milking traits of their ancestors; cows which will pay their way at the pail, and then, drying off in nine or ten months, throw calves that will feed into profitable steers. The existence of such a strain within the breed, recorded, as it would be, in the regular herdbook, as well as in the appendix, would be a marked advantage to the all-beef breeder who was catering to a foreign or special trade in beef bulls, but wished occasionally to restore, in some degree, the milking qualities of his own cows. It is to the direct and great advantage of every Shorthorn breeder, whether he himself wishes to breed dual-purpose cattle or not, to push this record-of-performance scheme so that we may develop a dual-purpose strain in the only feasible way, viz., by selecting with the eye for beef, and by the authenticated milk and butter-fat records for dairy performance.

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Will there be a field for such a dual-purpose cow in this day and age, when the early-maturing idea holds sway? Most assuredly. It is the one really economical way of producing our supply of domestic beef, and it will pay infinitely better than to depend on the all-beef type, even presuming that we had to sell the steers for half a cent a pound less. How anyone can make a profit on high-priced land keeping a cow twelve months to produce a calf to be raised and fattened for beef, is a question that must be answered by devotees of the special-purpose beef-type idea. If America's future beef supply has to be produced by cows of the special beef breeds, they and their calves being pastured and fed on high-priced land, the price of steaks will soar out of all reason, with serious restriction of consumption as a consequence.

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As for the special-purpose dairy cow, she has her place to fill, and will never be ousted from it. She is capable of squaring her own accounts. There are thousands of farmers, however, who prefer not to keep too large a stock of milk cows, and who would gladly content themselves with a somewhat smaller financial return from a breed which, while giving profitable returns at the pail, would yield a by-product in the form of a calf that could be raised and fattened at a fair profit. This is the dual-purpose ideal. It is perfectly feasible, and earnestly demanded by the rank and file of farmers who, though saying little, are thinking a good deal. And, by the way, it is worth noting that the most popular dairy cow in