

THE FARMING WORLD

Devoted to Canadian Country Life

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The Cost of Beef

We are grateful to Mr. Gunn for his effort in last issue to enlighten us on the proportion of profit which rightly belongs to the several persons handling the steer intended for the butcher's block; the farmer, the drover, the wholesale butcher or packer, the retail butcher and the consumer. We are afraid the figures given by Mr. Gunn are not very exact and are open to correction. Unless they are absolutely correct they are of no service at all. In our calculation we propose to start with the consumer.

Unless we are misinformed, not much beef of fair quality is sold in Toronto for less than 10 cts. The highest is say 23 cts. Perhaps a fair average for good beef would be 14 cts., which would make the 625 lbs. of beef for which the farmer receives \$60 cost the consumer \$87.50. But what about the farmer who has not received more than 4 cts. Thousands of cattle have been sold within the last 7 years for that price.

This gives the farmer \$48 or at 4½—\$54.

The point we would like to settle is what proportion of the \$87.50 paid by the consumer in Toronto rightly belongs to the farmer. We would be glad if Mr. Gunn will revise his figures and given us these in detail. The items look formidable when mentioned without giving particulars, such as freight, interest, feed, care, time in buying, market dues, and last though it may be not least, the tips to conductors. What we ought to have is an exact statement of each item. If this were done we are sure the interest would not startle us. The money is drawn usually on the day of shipment and whether it is one or four days before the market is reached would not much matter as in any case it would not be more than 3 cts. to 5 cts. added to the value of the steer. An average for freight ought easily to be obtained. We estimate it at from 50c. to \$1.00 per head according to distance. The care of a car load cannot amount to much as the cattle need none practically until they reach the yards and the time is arranged as far as possible to catch the first market day. The care and feed may well go together say at about 50c. per bullock. The market dues are plain 15c. each. Total \$1.45. As to the time in buying it all depends on the territory covered, but 3 to 5 days would be quite sufficient at \$3 per day. We believe the drovers would generally be satisfied with a profit of \$4.00 per head on a car load of 20, or \$80. Add \$4.00 to the other items gives \$5.45 as the drovers' share.

Next comes the wholesale butcher who kills the steer and should make a handsome profit on that operation out of offal and by-products. How much more he should receive is not for us to say but we will allow \$1.00 making \$6.45.

The retail butcher has the most difficult part to play, inasmuch as he must find the customer and take the chance of a slack demand and at times inevitable loss from spoiled meat, etc., and also loss from a credit business. Our estimate of prices as above gives him \$87.50—deducting the amount paid to farmer, with freight and other charges added or \$66.45, thus leaving \$21.05 as profit for selling 625 lbs. of meat or about 32 per cent.

To recapitulate, the farmer receives \$60.00, the drover, freight and other charges \$6.45, the retail butcher \$21.05. Total \$87.50.

We would like also to say to Mr. Gunn that it will pay the farmer to produce a better steer than he describes and if possible cater to a better class of customers and receive a better price. 6c. beef should be his aim and we are sure hundreds of customers who are vainly hunting for a better quality would be delighted to pay the extra price for first quality.

What are called butchers' cattle in these days are the scum of the country. Without form, color or quality they make a class of beef unfit for respectable people to consume. It has two qualities "Lean" and "Tough" which apparently suits the boarding house keeper who finds it lasts well and is above criticism as to presence of fat.

If there are any farmers who take pleasure in such production we have nothing to say in their defence but we would like to see the farmer who by the selection of the best breeding cattle and giving them proper care is able to produce a superior animal with meat of finest quality, given a price which will repay for his extra care and trouble. What has become of the people who demanded and were willing to pay 6c. and more (live weight) twenty-five years ago. We say advisedly and emphatically that the best cannot be produced at less and that there is no money for the farmer in the production of the so-called butcher's cattle at any price likely to be obtained. We repeat they have neither breeding, feeding quality, eating quality, nor profit making ability. Those who wish to produce them may do so but our doctrine is now and ever shall be "the greatest quality of the best quality" and as a consumer we now say we would prefer to pay 25c. per lb. for 1st quality rather than attempt to eat poor "butcher's stuff" at 10c.

J.

Cattle and Beef Prices

Editor The Farming World:

Referring to the editorial note in your issue of June 15, comparing the price of beef to the producer and the price to the middleman and to your request for my views on the subject, I might say at the outset that the question is a large one involving many complex problems which have to be viewed from different standpoints. This is so much so that a thorough discussion of the subject would take more space than with my somewhat limited knowledge I would care to occupy.

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