



MIXED FARMING

MANITOBA - SASKATCHEWAN - ALBERTA



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Dairying.

It is impossible to present in one article any exhaustive study of the subject of Dairying. Numerous books have been written on the subject, and those wishing to get detailed information, can get it from them. It is the object of this article merely to discuss a few of the most important points in regard to the adoption of dairying in Western Canada.

While dairying is one of the most profitable lines of farming, it is also one of the most exacting. No person should start into dairying unless he intends to pay strict attention to business. In a previous article I said that where cattle were only an incidental side line to wheat growing or some other specialty, then beef cattle would be preferable. They can be put in a back pasture during the busy season and left there. So long as there is pasture and water, they need no attention. Not so with dairy cattle, they must be milked twice a day, and in times of dry pasture, will need supplementary feed. It is not worth while giving this attention for a few cows so far as profit is concerned, though the convenience of having milk and butter may justify it. For dairying to be a money-making proposition it needs to be the main feature of the farm and to be given intelligence, thoroughness and care. When these conditions are complied with, there is no type of farming which is more sure of a satisfactory return than dairying. The dairy districts are among the most prosperous districts of the East and the United States, and similar districts will develop in time in Western Canada.

Developing a Dairy Herd.

It is advisable to choose a dairy breed to work with. The Holstein and Ayrshire are the most popular in Western Canada and are well suited to our conditions. The Holsteins are the largest dairy cattle and are the largest milk

producers. The Ayrshires do not give so much milk but are hardy and are economical producers. There are also Jerseys and Guernseys, giving richer milk than either of the others, and Red Polls and Dairy Shorthorns, combining milk production with beefing qualities.

A person starting to build up a dairy herd may start with grades and gradually improve, or may begin immediately with pure-breds. Except in rare cases, it is advisable to begin with grades and improve gradually. A person who has plenty of capital and experience might be justified in starting with pure-breds. For instance, the son of an established breeder starting out for himself would be justified in commencing with all pure-breds, as his experience and reputation would probably enable him to make it a success and to sell his surplus stock at desirable prices. The unknown man starting in usually finds it hard to sell his surplus bulls at pure-bred prices until he establishes his name as a good breeder. The unexperienced man is likely to make mistakes at first and the resultant losses are less serious with grade stock than with high-priced pure-bred stock. The best way to start, therefore, is to buy up a grade herd with as good indications of milking propensities as it is practicable to get at reasonable prices. Then buy a pure-bred bull of the breed that has been chosen.

Pure-bred Sire.

It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of a good sire in building up the herd. None but pure-breds should be used, and the best of these should be chosen in as far as it is practical to do so. Of course the modest beginner is not justified in competing with the big breeders in getting outstanding expensive bulls. These often sell for prices running into many hundreds and even so thousands of dollars. But in the dairy districts, bulls of decidedly high class breeding can be ob-

tained for reasonable prices, and such bulls will have a wonderful effect when crossed with mongrel stock. Being much more prepotent than mixed-bred cattle, they impress their characteristics very markedly on their progeny, and two crosses usually bring stock that would pass for pure-breds. It has been said that the bull is half the herd. So far as breeding up grade stock is concerned, the pure-bred sire is more than half the herd. He has equal parentage with all the cows, and his greater purity of blood and prepotency give him a distinct advantage over their mixed characters. The pure-bred sire is the very foundation of all improvement in stock breeding.

Testing and Selecting

No matter how much judgment a man uses in buying a lot of grade milk cows, he is sure to get a mixed lot. They are sure to vary greatly in their ability to produce. The standards of dairy type by which cattle are judged are really only a relative guide, and cannot be considered as at all accurate. Cows that show good dairy type often prove to be very inferior milkers and sometimes the most unpromising looking individuals do quite well in actual practice. Not even the best of judgment can pick out the profitable from the unprofitable in a herd, without making some mistakes. To make improvement, it is necessary to select. The poorer individuals must be discarded and replaced by better. Once the home-bred offspring of the pure-bred sire reach producing age they should be made the principal means of replacing the culls. By systematically breeding from the best and discarding the worst and always using a pure-bred bull from the better producing stock than those he is being used on, it is remarkable how quickly a uniform high-producing herd can be built up.

In this breeding up process, actual records of milk production are needed to get best results. A person depends on his observation and memory, he is very likely to be sadly misled in regard to the relative value of his cows. A cow that makes a big showing for a little while is likely to create a good impression while another cow that spreads it out more evenly over the year, is not properly appreciated. The only satisfactory way to get the information by which intelligent selection can be made, is to weigh the milk regularly. If a spring balance is hung on the stable wall, and a blank form tacked beside it, it is only a moment's work to weigh a cow's milk and mark it down. The most satisfactory way is to weigh every milking. However, if this seems too much bother, a fairly good idea of the production of the cows can be obtained by weighing once a week. The danger in this is that it will be forgotten, whereas if it is done at every milking, it becomes part of the operation and is not overlooked. Forms to be used in keeping milk records can be obtained free from the Experimental Farms or from the Agricultural Colleges.

The percentage of fat in the milk is almost as important as the weight, in fact, it is equally important where cream or butter are the products sold. Except for very large dairy plants, it is hardly necessary for the dairyman to get a Babcock tester. However, it is well worth while getting in co-operation with the dairy authorities of the various provinces and getting occasional fat tests made by them. I believe it is possible to get this done free in each of the Western provinces.

Feeding

If the dairy cow is to produce milk up to her full capacity, she

Continued on page 12

