

Dairy Production Conditions in the Pacific Northwest

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The relation of dairy farming to permanent agriculture is well known. Nevertheless the fact that the dairy cow returns to the soil nearly as much fertility as she takes from it is a very important factor, even in the Northwest. Where we expect to raise good crops we must keep up the supply of plant food in the soil. Where the rainfall is light more humus in the soil helps to give it water-holding capacity. The part that the dairy cow can play in helping to bring larger yields by adding fertility and increasing the humus supply is one of the most important problems with which our farmers have to deal.

The states of Oregon and Washington are divided into two distinct parts by the Cascade Mountains. The eastern part of these states is semi-arid, having a rainfall ranging from ten inches near the range to twenty-four inches at the extreme eastern border of the states and extending over into Idaho. The west side of the Cascade Range is the humid section, where the rainfall ranges from twenty-five to one hundred inches or more annually. This difference in rainfall is accompanied by similar differences in soil conditions and for this reason there is a large variation in the kinds of feed that can be grown for the dairy cow.

The "West Side" Region

Consider first that portion of the Northwest which lies west of the Cascades. Here the conditions are most favorable for profitable dairying for many reasons. In the first place the climate is rather mild in the winter and cool in the summer. In all of this section cows can be kept out of doors or without very much shelter ten months out of the year. In fact, in some parts it is so mild that the cows do not need to be stabled at any time except just enough to keep them dry. This fact makes it possible for a farmer to go into the dairy business without investing heavily in buildings and it enables a man with small means to put practically all of his money into land and cows, both of which will bring returns right from the start.

In the second place, this mild climate permits the growing of green feed practically all the year round. We are all aware of the importance of green feed for the dairy cow. The cow that gets some succulent feed in addition to the dry roughage or grain which she may be getting is going to make a greater profit for her owner than the cow that is fed on dry feed alone. In some sections of the country the highest production is obtained only during three or four months, when the cows are on pasture. The dairymen in this locality, however, get the maximum every month in the year. For the most part, this green feed is supplied by means of luxuriant pastures. This is claimed by some to be a wasteful method of supplying feed, but when one considers the amount of labor saved by pasturing and at the same time the value of freedom to the cow and the privilege to eat at will, you can not help to commend this practice, especially in sections where the land is reasonably cheap and where pasture grasses do well.

When we look at the beautiful Jersey and Guernsey cows and see the large amount of milk and butter they produce, and also the strong, robust Holsteins with their enormous milk production, we wonder under what conditions these breeds were developed. Looking back we find that all of these breeds have been developed in a country almost identical in climate to our own Northwest. Does it not seem probable then that we should make some wonderful development along this line.

Marketing

In addition to these advantages we find that the marketing conditions in the section west of the Cascades have been most excellent. Fully three-fourths of the population of Washington and Oregon is to be found in the cities, most of which lie on the west coast. Aside from this a large part of the population is engaged in the lumbering and fishing industries, all of which are heavy consumers and non-producers of dairy products. There are also a large number of condenseries in this section, which take a large part of the milk that is produced. In the state of Washington alone over 50,000 tons of milk have been marketed in the condenseries annually during the past four or five years. These conditions made it possible for the dairymen in this section to market their products right at home and have given them an opportunity to sell at a high enough figure so that a profit can be realized.

The "East Side" Region

On the east side of the Cascades in the dryer sections we have another set of conditions. We still have comparatively mild winters and cool summers, though the winters are a little colder and the summers

a little warmer than are found on the west coast. That section close to the Cascade Range is the irrigated section and for the past ten years most of the interest has been along the line of orcharding, but even the orchardist has found that it is to his advantage to have live stock on his tract so as to increase the production from his trees. A trip into the fruit section now will reveal the fact that great progress is being made along dairying lines—nearly every small tract having from one to a dozen cows on it, and some larger ones as high as fifty to seventy-five.

The big advantage of this section over any other is that it will grow enormous yields of alfalfa, hay, and corn for silage. Five tons of hay to the acre and thirty tons of green corn for silage are common yields. This gives a cheap feed for the dairy cow and one that is conducive to great milk production.

These conditions are also to be found in that fertile irrigated country in southern Idaho and eastern Oregon. Here the yields of alfalfa and corn are even larger than those found in Washington and this makes up for the lack in marketing facilities. With alfalfa hay at five dollars per ton and corn silage at \$2.50 per ton, which prices are prevalent in these irrigated sections, we find that large cows giving forty pounds of three per cent milk daily can produce a pound of butter-fat at a feed cost of less than ten cents, and one hundred pounds of milk at a feed cost of less than thirty cents.

The Inland Empire

That section which comprises the extreme eastern part of the states of Washington and Oregon and the panhandle of Idaho, sometimes called the Inland Empire, has a different set of conditions. Here the rainfall ranges from eighteen to twenty-four inches annually. Most of the land is very rolling, so that irrigation is not possible, even if it were necessary. By practicing summer fallowing, however, large crops of the small grains, especially wheat, are grown. At the prevailing prices of these farm products the farmers are able to get fair returns from their farms, but it is certain that dollar wheat and corresponding high prices for other cereals will not continue forever, in which case the farmers in this section will turn toward the keeping of live stock. They say that history repeats itself. We can therefore assume that these grain farmers who are mining the soil without putting anything back will sooner or later turn their attention toward the live stock industry—just the thing that has been done in parts of the wheat belt of the central states.

Many farmers in this section have already made good in the dairy business. It has now been demonstrated that by planting peas, corn, carrots, beets, or in fact most of the crops that can be cultivated, having these crops follow wheat, instead of allowing the land to lie fallow, almost as large a yield of wheat will be obtained the next season as when summer fallowing is practiced. This means that the land will not be idle as much as it has been in the past. At the same time it will provide labor for every month in the year.

These crops make excellent cow feed and wheat raisers are already turning their attention to dairying as a side line and in some cases it is becoming the main line of farming in this section of the country.

Marketing Dairy Products

Now we will consider another phase of the dairy conditions, that of marketing. Upon looking into the butter and cheese industry, especially with reference to the exports and imports, we see that the following conditions exist (these figures were compiled from those obtained from various butter houses in Seattle and Spokane) and are largely estimates for Washington: About five years ago 650 cars of butter and 74 cars of cheese were being shipped into this state. In 1912 there were about 316 cars of butter and 64 cars of cheese shipped in. In 1913, 303 cars of butter and 72 cars of cheese. Last year it dwindled down to 119 cars of butter, but the cheese increased to 92 cars. On the other hand, we find that we exported but very little butter in 1910, whereas in 1914 some 30 cars were exported to Australia and New Zealand. While these figures are for Washington only, similar conditions exist in Oregon and no doubt they can be applied to California as well.

The figures for cheese seem to show that we could well afford to pay more attention to that end of the business and to be sure, we would like to see several cheese centers, such as the well-known one in Tillamook County, Oregon, develop in various parts of the Northwest. However, the figures on cheese include cheese from Oregon into Washington, and if we were to consider the Northwest as a whole we would find that we are producing about as much as we are consuming.

Now what does this mean? It means that the time is close at hand when we will be producing more than we can consume. Our home market has enabled us to dispose of the product at a low cost of marketing and at a good price, but that the time is not far off when we must look for distant markets, at which time we must expect much lower prices than we are getting. How shall this situation be met? We know that better quality of the product, butter or cheese, is going to be demanded by those who buy our goods. The better quality of the raw product is the first and prime importance in getting better quality in the finished product. This factor is under the control of the producer and to get this high quality necessitates paying for the product on the quality basis, that is, grading the milk or cream. This will meet with a good deal of disfavor among the producers of milk. The dairyman feels, and perhaps rightly so, that he is underpaid for the work he is now doing. This condition of affairs can only be met by having the proper cows, and this is the most potent factor in success or failure in the dairy business.

The high records of production of the Northwest show what can be done in this country, but when we consider the grade herds or in fact any of the herds that are not producing breeding stock we find that the average production from each cow is remarkably low. The average production from the cows in the United States has been placed at approximately 150 pounds of butter-fat and 3800 pounds of milk. The average in the Pacific Northwest is a little higher than this, being about 180 pounds of butter-fat and 4500 pounds of milk. With this low average we know that a large part of the cows are not paying for their keep. I have previously stated that with a cow producing 360 pounds of fat a year the cost of producing one pound of fat is as low as ten cents where feed is cheap. You can readily see that if this cow were a 150-pound cow the cost would be something over twenty cents, and this for feed alone. With such a cow a dairyman can never hope to make a living.

But as I have stated, some of the breeders are producing high record stock that is being well distributed over the country. The bulls especially are being widely disseminated and by this means the average of production is going to be raised. We have talked for better cows for many years and it seems that producers have taken very little heed, but now when the prices are sure to get low the high producing cow is a necessity and the owner of the cow will be quick to realize it.

The Outlook for the Future

It has been suggested by some that it will not be long before we will be unable to dispose of our dairy products at any price. Of course we are not able to say definitely what may happen in the future, but in this connection I wish to call attention to the fact that by means of the Panama Canal we can ship butter to the eastern coast at an extremely low figure, something less than two cents per pound. In addition to this railroad freight rates will undoubtedly be lowered to compete with water transportation. This means that we will be able to put our products on distant markets in competition with the north, central, and eastern states, and since our conditions for producing the products are as good as can be found anywhere there is no reason why our farmers will not fare as well as or better than those in other sections.

Such are the dairy production conditions as they exist. There is no question but that we have an ideal country for producing dairy products. The mild climate, good soil, and enough water to produce good crops are sure to make cheap feed. The high producing cow will come in time and even if our over-production will require us to market our products in distant countries or parts of this country, we can make the business profitable by proper management.

ADVANTAGES OF THE SILO

Too much can not be said at this time to dairymen and even cattlemen regarding the benefits and advantages of a good silo. Good ensilage enables cows to produce more economically and a larger number of animals can be maintained on a given number of acres. The silo ration, or a ration in which ensilage is introduced, keeps the animals fed in good physical condition. It really provides summer feed during winter.

By placing feed, such as corn, in the silo it keeps corn stalks from the manure heap. Again, the silo makes palatable feed of materials grown on the farm that would not otherwise be eaten, and it enables the farmer to preserve feed which may mature at a rainy time of the year, when drying and curing would be impossible.

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