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Dairy Farming in New Zealand

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New Zealand is primarily a grazing country and for this reason one of her most important primary industries is dairy farming. Dairy farming has, in the past few years, become of increasing importance and has received proportionally more attention. In eighteen years the number of dairy cows has increased by five hundred thousand; the number of milking plants in daily use is twenty one thousand; six hundred and eighty butter and cheese factories employ seventy six thousand people, or over nine percent of the male population of this country; ninety percent of the exports are pastoral; the dairying industry has received a startling impetus, yet it is today on the brink of an unparalleled depression. The fault lies not in the quality of the freshly produced butter, and certainly not in the quantity available for export, but rather in the distance separating us from our principal market, England. Distance may seem a small obstacle and one easily overcome, but the depression facing the dairy farmer of New Zealand today is due to extreme remoteness and distance from our market. By the time butter has been in cold storage for a month or more, it has lost a great deal of its original flavour and freshness, and is not of a sufficiently high standard to compete with our several foreign rivals who have the great advantage of close proximity to the Home market. One of the greatest disadvantages of extended cold storage is that the butter attains an undesirable hardness. Consequently one pound of foreign butter

will do the work of one and a quarter pounds of New Zealand butter. Although the foreign butter may be dearer on the market, it is obviously false economy to purchase the New Zealand brand. In time these defects will be remedied and what is destined to be a great industry is being fully developed in face of a falling market and an economic depression.

Dairy farming in New Zealand is not restricted to one province or area. Although the main sources of supply are Auckland, Taranaki, Hawke's Bay, and Wellington, the remainder of the dominion contributes four thousand nine hundred and thirty three tons to a total export tonnage of ninety thousand five hundred and thirty five tons. It will be seen that almost ninety five percent of the total produce comes from the North Island, yet rapid advances have been made in dairy farming in the less suitable South Island. It is there that pasturage was first improved by the use of fertiliser. The North Island was not long in following this lead, and today over three times as much fertiliser is being used in the North as in the South. Although the area of the South Island exceeds that of the North by over fourteen thousand square miles, the area under cultivation, that is to say under fertiliser, in the North is five times as great as that in the South. This is so perhaps because there are far more dairy farms in the North Island than in the South, and consequently, as fertilising greatly increases the number of animals that can graze on any holding, the North Island has a greater need in this matter.

The quality of butter exported from New Zealand is ^{is protected} by a rigorous dairy act, and by the

Dairy Produce General Regulations, issued in 1933. These may be described as two Acts regulating the production, preparation, and manufacture under proper sanitary conditions of dairy produce intended for sale, human consumption, or export. Inspectors are empowered to inspect any premises used for the production or manufacture of dairy produce, to condemn any produce considered unfit for human consumption, and to see remedied any defects leading to uncleanness in the dairy or factory. All dairy produce intended for export must comply with the requirements of the Act as to inspection, grading and marking. Butter containing more than 16 percent of ^xwater or less than 80 percent cannot be exported.

In accordance with the regulations concerning cleanliness, embodied in the Act, cow-byres are the objects of much attention from Inspectors who are exceedingly strict in the observance of the rules made out. An average cow byre in New Zealand is a large shed standing alone. The floor is concrete and on either side of the central aisle are bails. The cow byre can usually take about fifteen cows at a time, accommodation being not in the least limited. The byres are, on the whole, large, well ventilated, with concrete floor* and whitewashed walls. Automatic milking machines are quite common and gleams, scrupulously clean, from their places.

New Zealand dairy farms have an average of about fifty head of cattle but many large factories are supplied almost entirely by small holders with farms of less than ten cows. The small farmer occupies a more important place in New Zealand than in any other dairy producing country. The increased fertility of the dairy farming land owing to extensive fertilization, enables many farmers

with only a few acres of land to keep sufficient cattle to get a livelihood for themselves. Their land is usually fenced off into several paddocks where the cattle are fed in alternate divisions. This ensures an equal growth of grass and also that the land can recuperate for a time without any of the detrimental effects which cows continually on the same pasture would produce.

The most commonly seen breeds of cow in New Zealand at the present time are probably the jersey, and crossbred cows with predominating jersey strains. The purebred jersey does particularly well in the North but several profitable herds are thriving in the colder southern districts. Several other breeds such as the Red Poll, Ayrshire, Friesian, and the Milking Shorthorn are fairly common but have not attained the popularity of the jersey.

The life of a dairy farmer in New Zealand is not essentially different from that of one in England but it is nevertheless a very busy and intensely interesting one. Milking machines and mechanical devices have made his life easier to a certain degree but have not yet altered the essential hours of his working day. Every day he must rise at four o'clock. Sunday means to him, not a day of rest, but rather a time when he carries on as usual while others are enjoying the rest earned by a week of toil. Winter and summer he rises at this hour for the work of the dairy farmer cannot wait until a later hour. When he rises in summer he must bring the cows from their pasturage to the byre. Even with the assistance of a six-cow milking machine it takes an hour to milk thirty cows so that the farmer turns the cows out for the day at

five thirty. Now he has to wash and clean the milking plant and the cans in which the cream is to be sent to the factory. After breakfasting at six thirty he separates the milk and cream and places the cans at the roadside to be collected by the lorry from the factory. Then comes the tedious part of his work. The cow byre has to be cleared out after the morning's milking and this is the next morning task. This entails the scraping and then the hosing of the concrete floor. The cow manure has to be placed on a heap which is periodically collected and sold. By the time this has been done and the machines polished and sterilised lunch is ready. At four thirty the cattle must again be brought into the byre for the afternoon milking. This occupies again an hour so at five thirty the farmer has the busiest time of the day ahead of him. The same process as in the morning must be gone through. Again the byre must be cleaned, the machines washed & the cans put out. This is not done until six thirty and then the dairy farmer may call the remainder of the day his own.

In Winter, however, he has yet other tasks to perform. Owing to the scarcity of grass, he must procure mangels and green oats to supplement the food obtained from the grass in the paddocks. He must then feed his cattle twice a day, before milking in both the morning and afternoon. He may have a patch of land where he can himself grow mangels and perhaps oats thereby reducing his expense but greatly increasing his labour. If not, he must purchase his foodstuffs and have them carted to his cow byre. This gives him less work but naturally entails a greatly increased cost. The life of a New Zealand dairy farmer

if not a very profitable one, is at least healthy and enjoyable. His life is largely outdoors, caring for his stock and seeking to improve his land.

Again we come to the all absorbing problem of markets for our dairy produce. That the New Zealand dairy farmer is producing butter excellently suited to stand the long period of refrigeration is proved by the high quality of our butter on the English market. New Zealand can never gain renown for her dairy produce by the volume she exports, fame can be achieved only through quality. Such a degree of excellence must be reached that our butter will be ranked on a higher grade than the best foreign butter. Our country is not sufficiently large to compete with the United States of America, Russia, or the Netherlands as far as volume is concerned, where she should excel is in the quality of her dairy butter. This could doubtless be done by means of absolute protection in the form of an Act of Parliament. Such an Act could ensure that only cream of the very highest grade could be used in the manufacture of butter for export. In such matters as these, our government has, in the past, been sorely lacking in initiative but we hope that in the future, something may be done to remedy this lamentable state of affairs in the most suitable way.

So much has been said of the manufacture and marketing of butter that cheese has been almost entirely neglected. It does not occupy any such important place in our exports as does butter yet its association with the dairy industry renders it worthy of mention by itself. There are, in New Zealand, not factories that produce both cheese alone. All produce butter and cheese under

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practically identical conditions. The same regulations as apply to the production of butter apply also to cheese. A high standard of cleanliness prevails, the cheese being made for the most part, under modern conditions with up to date machinery. The varieties of cheese made in New Zealand include cheddar, swiss, and stilton. Of these more cheddar is made than either of the other two but in point of popularity it may not occupy first place. As is the case with our butter, we can never attain renown for the quantity of cheese produced in the comparatively small country of New Zealand. Our reputation must be established through the high quality of the cheese intended for export to foreign countries. We are today the largest exporters of butter to the British Isles, but little effort is being made to retain this trade, small in itself, but of great importance to a country so relatively small as New Zealand. Foreign competitors are striving to improve the quality of their product while New Zealand, bursting with self confidence complacently surveys the prospect of shortly losing her monopoly of the English market. In the methods of the present New Zealand authorities lies only failure. Success in foreign markets can be achieved in the future, only if modern methods and competent authorities take the place of the existing system as regards both method and the type of authority appointed.

The future ahead of dairy farming is indistinct, but the ever increasing population of this busy world must eventually absorb all the produce offered on the world markets. In spite of inevitable depressions, the future ahead of the dairying industry of New Zealand is indeed a bright one.

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