

GRADUATING THESIS.

THE FUTURE OF BEEF PRODUCTION
IN AMERICA.

by

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Recognizing beef production as one of the most important industries of America and one that must endure for all time, I have chosen to look into its future with thought for methods and management which shall combine to make the business of furnishing beef for the tables of the world more pleasant and profitable for the producer at the same time placing a superior product in the hands of the consumer bringing satisfaction most complete to him.

The beef industry has taken its place second in importance only to the growing of cereals. It is supplementary to the grain industry in that it is a means for creating a more desirable finished product giving greater range of profit and furnishing a balance to the grain food-stuffs in the diet of man. The west primarily is the home of the beef industry although wherever corn grows and flourishes there beef production is of no small importance.

Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Missouri, Nebraska, Kansas and Oklahoma are states most prominent in this important industry for the reason that the principal feeding stuffs are numbered among their products and are most easily marketed in the shape of beef. Texas, Arizona, Colorado, Montana and Idaho, the states of the range, can only furnish the markets with cattle which may be utilized in the corn belt for the manufacture of a desirable and satisfactory finished article of diet. Thus we see twelve states actively engaged in furnishing beef to the world. An idea of the enormity of the business may be gathered from a study of the great packing plants situated at Chicago, St. Louis, Kansas City, St. Joseph and Omaha with killing capacity varying from 10,000 to 40,000 daily for each city.

I now pass to a study of the past, present and future of the

beef industry in these states for we may exclude from consideration all other sections of America as of little importance relatively when compared with them. Time was when cattle wandered over the states of Indiana and Illinois in open range but that was in a day and age when man had neither the strength nor knowledge to deal heavily in this industry. That was the day of homespun and lindsey-woolsey and mutton furnished his table with meat. In that day railroads were few and packing houses were not in existence. With the gradual growth of the country, with the increase of population in the east and the development of all industries in this country has come a development in the cattle industry, the result only of a crying need. Just as the prairies of Illinois were broken up the ranges of the west are being broken under the subjection of the plow and the near future presents problems in beef production which require careful thought and study for their solution. Already we have seen the three and four year old steer of the range go and have the yearling and two year old taking his place in the stocker markets. The range fed steer no longer satisfies the fat stock market nor has the range the vitality to put such a steer upon the market. The prime beef must now come from the corn and alfalfa belt, where with a feeding period of fifty days to six months he may be made fit to meet all the requirements of a most exacting market. As we see the range broken and fenced, the number of animals per acre increased and the practice of early marketing becoming more common we see the big feeder who fed thousands of cattle in single lots going into other business if not to the wall and the small farmer usurping his place. The small herd of fifty and one-hundred head has become the popular feeding lot and the large cattle feeding operations are less to be seen as the years advance.

Already this has come in the east and it is coming fast in the west. This is the future of the cattle industry. The range must go, the big feeder must go and in his place will come the small, intensive farmer who knows the value of a dollar, who knows economy, who minimizes efforts and secures maximum returns. The cattleman of the future then must be a tiller of the soil also, supplementing his former operations with that of cattle raising and fattening cattle for the markets. There is very little virgin soil remaining and if respectable crops are expected from the field of the farm there must be an economy practiced by which the fertility of the land may be preserved. The key words then of the future in the greatest of all industries, agriculture, must be an association of farm crops and cattle with the practice of crop rotation. The practice of continual cropping with no return to the land has ruined many good acres placing them where only scientific practices of agriculture can restore them to their original fertility. Crops must come in systematic rotation and the material which is removed must be returned in the form of manures. This can only be done when the field products are kept on the farm and transformed to their final finished condition before marketing. This new system of agriculture will necessitate the most rigid practices of economy; on the side of field crops appearing in more careful cultivation of smaller areas, producing a total product greater by half or a third than that which results from the present day practices and on the side of the cattle industry, better bred animals which will mature and ripen for the block at a much earlier age. Passing then to practices in beef production which should be common within the next few years we declare ourselves still in favor of the range. We could not abolish the open range for there is far too much land

that cannot be used otherwise. We would put it in close touch with the small farm leaving the latter to do what the range can never do, produce prime beef at from eighteen to twenty-eight months of age. Six months of its life is as long as the range calf should spend in the open. When the summer season is over and the best that is on the range has been secured it should be sent into the section where its continued growth and development may be assured, where it may be pushed continually to its maturity. The young calf just off the range must of necessity have excellent care if it is to thrive and grow for the change of environment is enough to set it back materially in its development. A winter of careful attention and feeding with good shelter should leave the calf at the beginning of its second year nearer its final goal than is usually the steer of two years. A summer upon a green and luxuriant tame grass pasture will then give the young animal the tone of a prime beef which needs only a few weeks of graining to be made a topper.

Range conditions, too, will gradually change, must change if the range is to give its best service. The day of the grade range bull is passed and in his place is to be found the purebred. From the many breeding herds of the country the very best material that can be found is being taken to the range as none too good. This work can only continue and to supplement this as primitive range conditions are eliminated and more men appear upon this important field greater care can be given to the selection and grading of the female stuff. Already much of this work has been done and it is having its effect upon the cattle which come off the range. In a few years the range cow should surpass in excellence the grade cow of the corn belt.

The modern range man has come to the conclusion that it does

not pay him to maintain his cattle upon the range through the inclement months without additional sustenance, and wherever it is possible to grow forage crops upon the range by irrigation or from the advantages of natural situation there will be found a field which is to minister to the cattle, keeping them at least upon maintenance rations. The future will see even more of this practice and further as the cultivation of land stretches farther and farther toward the region which it cannot penetrate will the range cattle be better cared for with better service resulting in the work which they are to do.

Summing up the points wherein the future of beef production is already giving promise of development the combination of grain and stock farming on a small number of acres as compared with the old range seems most potent with meaning. To produce a prime article requires concentration of time and attention and in beef production this can only be given when the number of cattle is few and the facilities for caring for them are of the best. While the breeding of beef cattle upon the small farm is not to be excluded the large ranch of the west and south must primarily furnish the young, feeding stuff which will be fed on the farm. Profit on the small farm will depend in the future not on quantity but upon quality, economy, and the rapid turning over of the investment similarly to that of any other business. Upon the purebred stock of the country is the future of the beef industry building to a wonderful degree. The purebreds exist not primarily for their own satisfaction but for what they can do for the advancement of the breed and the production of beef. The time should soon be here when the grade bull will be a rarity. He has had his day and has done his work and should now give place to the better

individual which will not continue the increase on the same level but raise them to one still higher. The matter of feeding and shelter will in the future do much for the production of a prime and early maturing beef. Unless these factors are carefully considered loss of time, money and satisfaction will result.

Finally it is for the young stockman to institute new methods, to seize opportunities and to do good for himself and the beef industry. He cannot make a fortune in a year nor even in ten years but by careful study and hard consistent work he may lay up a modest competence at the same time that he derives the most pleasant satisfaction from one of America's most prominent industries.

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