

Horse and cart days down on the farm

Things have changed down on the dairyfarm in the past 40 years. But there are still many areas in which improvements will come.

Today we have 64-cow rotary milking sheds, powerful tractors, blockage-free drum mowers, hydraulic equipment and farmer-service organisations such as veterinary clubs and the consulting officers.

There are many other commonly-accepted features of the modern dairying scene and I feel that many who work on our farms today do not realise that their long hours and difficulties were at least matched by their counterparts of the thirties.

In the past

The other night I was thinking of some of the changes since I was working on a top Waikato farm at Matangi 40 years ago. Even then it was milking one cow to the acre.

In some respects the basic dairying scene has not changed. Farmers still milk cows and worry about production and the cows' basic food is still pasture, whether in grass or hay and silage.

But let us look back at what was involved in milking in the thirties and at making hay and silage.

The alarm clock shatters the pre-dawn silence. Its juddering 3.45 clamour heralds a day which will end, for eight months of the year, at 8pm. Workaday chores end when we turn loose the horse after delivering the evening milk to the dairy factory.

We milked 125 cows at that time and usually four of us were in the shed, though we could manage with three at a pinch.

Those were times of six sets of cups in a walk-through shed, back chains, leg ropes—those filthy things—no running water for washing and what was then accepted as essential, hand-stripping.

Primitive

Washing-up was primitive. I didn't see a high-pressure hosing unit in a milking shed until post-war days. We spent seven hours a day in the milking shed—and, in the light of present-day knowledge, much of the time and effort was unnecessary.

Doing the run to the factory was a job that gave pleasure or discomfort according to the weather. Cardigan Bay might well have descended from one of the mares which raced in stirring contests where the prize was a one-place gain in the queue at the factory stage. Cold, frosty mornings and nights turned the trek to the factory into miserable torture. Often one felt too numb to unharness the horse at the end of the return trip. It was a far cry from tanker collection and the happy release of no cans to wash.

We boasted an electric hot-water cylinder. I subsequently worked on at least one farm without such a "modern" amenity and a supply of hot water was contingent on a supply of wood to fire a chip heater.

Pooled

Hay and silage making was the reverse of the contract system which so many use now. We worked with two neighbours. Equipment and labour were pooled and so was about 100 acres of haymaking activity. Fortunately, our neighbours hadn't progressed to the stage of making silage and this was confined to our farm. We were on free-draining country and the grass went straight into a pit dug in level ground.

Horses' intelligence

We encountered little trouble in making silage but, when it came to feeding out, there was a need for strength and stamina. Our pit was 10 feet deep and silage had to be forked from this hole on to a dray which, when loaded, towered another eight feet above the ground. No

.....
This is the monthly diary of a South Auckland town milk farmer in which he tells of the seasonal round on his farm and of the day-to-day problems in farm management. His notes are usually written on or about the 20th of the month preceding publication.
.....

Farmchair

Thoughts

by

"The Laird"



tractors, no front-end loaders, just "hard yakka."

Haymaking was still a bit of a social occasion with a lunch served at the stack for the eight or 10 men involved.

One relied greatly on the intelligence and ability of horses not only for mowing, but also for providing the power that operated the stacker. We normally detailed a man to lead and back the stacker horse, but occasionally one could unearth a treasure which could be reliably worked by spoken command.

It was all loose hay, mostly turned manually with the final preparation for sweeping done

with a dump rake. Cleaning paddocks was almost a fetish.

Birds had little success in finding nesting material after the double raking that paddocks received when the sweeping was done.

I have heard one or two folk suggest that picking up bales is harder work than our old-fashioned technique of putting loose hay into a stack. Don't you believe it. If it were true, the baler wouldn't be the commonplace piece of equipment it is today.

Stock health was just as much a problem in the thirties as it

(Continued on page 41)

BELGIAN BASIC SLAG

ADDS MINOR MINERALS AND TRACE ELEMENTS

Available now from your Merchant or Stock and Station Agent

Farmchair thoughts on horse and cart days . . .

(From page 39)

is today. I don't agree with suggestions that stock health problems have been accentuated by increased stocking rates. Strain 19 vaccine for contagious abortion hadn't emerged from the biochemists' test tubes and abortion was a serious problem on many farms, particularly among two-year-olds.

Udder inflation

Calcium boro-gluconate as a cure for milk fever had still to come and we relied on the technique of inflating the udder with air and tying the teats with tape. We saved some cows and lost more. Grass staggers and bloat were both major problems. As with other health problems, they were dealt with on a "do-it-yourself" basis. Veterinarians and veterinary supplies were virtually non-existent.

Put yourself in the situation of having to deal with an outbreak of mastitis or scours and the only remedies were those you could dream up with the help of old wives' tales. Scouring calves got gruel made from flour and water with raw egg added. This was diluted with lucerne tea—a brew concocted by boiling lucerne hay in a copper of water. Lots of calves died.

Between-milking chores included ragwort control with sodium our only chemical.

Rabbits

Carting accumulated heaps of dung from adjacent to the milking shed was a job which took considerable time each autumn. Keeping rabbits under control was a major task even though we were helped by professional rabbiters who made a living from skins.

Every year burrows and warrens were gassed and filled. Mowing hay paddocks with horse-drawn mowers was hazardous on farms where this job was neglected.

Topdressing was a twice-a-year job I enjoyed. A horse-drawn box topdresser took much

longer than a bulk spinner now takes to cover a 10-acre paddock.

Everything was in bags. If a mixture was wanted of, say, super and potash, you mixed it yourself with a banjo-shaped arrangement known as a shovel. If memory serves, super cost about \$9 a ton.

Calf for 25c

Prices for milk, calves and culled cows weren't too bright and it took a lot more bobby calves to pay for a ton of super than it does today. A good bobby calf would realise about 25 cents.

Milkfat payout varied from company to company. During my two-year stay at Matangi, one company withheld payment one month because of overgenerosity earlier in the season.

Wages

Wages were in line with fat prices. After starting at five shillings, or 50 cents, a week, my pay was raised to \$1, with a further rise to \$2 a week during my second year.

At the level of payout from the factory that equated with the return from 20 lb of fat. Today, my 17-year-old employee straight from the city, gets the equivalent of 65 lb fat each week.

Time off was a rare treat. We worked all Saturday regularly, though under pressure. I was allowed to sneak off for Saturday afternoon sport during the winter. Once a month on payday we had half a day in Hamilton and that was it.

Scope

We've progressed a long way since 1932 and clearly we have plenty of scope for much more progress over the next 40 years. The 85-hour week we worked then is a thing of the past on most dairy farms—but the present working week is still too long when compared with that in most industries.

We can make further gains in pasture strains and species; in stock quality, in animal health, in mechanisation, in conservation techniques and, I hope, in ragwort control.

BEEF INVESTMENT GROUPS

by

GEMCO

They may be the answer to your tax problems in this year of increased payout

It's the Beef Industry going public

Join a Beef Investment Group—

It's the NEW concept in B.I.G. BUSINESS

How to get maximum tax benefits:

- A minimum investment of \$500 with a five-year term.
- Complete tax write-off in the first year of investment and deferrable indefinitely providing the investment remains in livestock.
- Investment before March 31 is necessary to obtain the tax benefit for the current financial year.
- The best security in New Zealand farming—capital invested in Beef, New Zealand's fastest growing agricultural industry.
- Good income yield—conservatively estimated at 12 per cent per annum.

SEE YOUR ACCOUNTANT NOW OR SEND THIS COUPON
TODAY FOR FULL INFORMATION

GEMCO Beef Investment,
P.O. Box 11-137,
WELLINGTON.

Please send your brochure on GEMCO'S Beef Investment Groups to:

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____