CATTLE FEEDING IS BOOMING BUSINESS

Cattle feeding is a growing industry. Its expansion has helped stockmen to meet the keen competition for the consumer’s meat dollar in this country, according to the Agricultural Marketing Service.

Between 1951 and 1957, slaughter of steers rose almost two-thirds, as compared with an 80-percent increase in the rapidly expanding broiler industry. Production of steer beef is still almost triple that of commercial broiler meat and is double the outturn of all chicken meat.

Cattle feeding is in its second period of rapid growth. The first occurred in the late 1930’s, when the volume almost doubled; the present period began about 1950. As incomes rose following World War II, consumer demand for beef — particularly the higher grades from fed cattle — was stepped up.

Changes in merchandising have contributed to the stronger demand for U. S. Choice and U. S. Good beef. Moreover, the enthusiasm for grilling beef outdoors has increased the demand for high-grade beef in recent years.

Larger production and declining prices of feed have resulted in increased livestock feeding. After rising steadily for several years, feed harvest reached a peak in 1957. Farm prices for feed grains generally have declined since 1951 and in January 1958 were the lowest since 1943.

Interest in cattle feeding is a typical feature of the peak-supply phase of the cattle cycle. A shift from cow-and-calf operations to feeding was an important factor in the reduction of total cattle numbers which began during 1956 but which may be slowing.

Another reason for the expansion in cattle feeding is that new technological methods have been used more extensively in this operation than in any other phase of raising or feeding meat animals. Use of stilbestrol in livestock feeds and of mechanical feed dispensers in commercial feed lots are examples of the new technologies employed.

The following are the three major changes which have taken place in feeding operations.

1. Livestock feeding is no longer confined to the Corn Belt. The operation has expanded substantially in the West and is now accelerating in the South. The inventory of cattle on feed in the western Corn Belt has advanced 60 percent since the early 1930’s, and that in the eastern Corn Belt has doubled. In the West, cattle on feed are 3.5 times more numerous than they were 25 years ago. This region now accounts for a fourth of all cattle on feed in the Nation and for an even greater percentage of annual marketings of fed cattle.

2. The feeding period has been shortened. The West has been at the forefront in this trend. In California, feeding is intensive, lasting only about 120 days. Cattle in this State are fed to a slightly lower grade than are those in the Corn Belt, and fewer reach high-Choice or Prime.

Feed lots in California are refilled twice during the year, while those in Colorado are re-
filled only once. The feeding period in the Corn Belt is somewhat shorter than formerly but still does not average a complete second turnover during the year.

3. The emphasis is on moderately high-finish cattle. Fewer coarse and underfinished animals now go to slaughter, and extremely high finish in cattle has become less popular since the number of outlets for high U.S. Choice and U.S. Prime beef has decreased. The range of high-Good to middle-Choice probably represents the current preference for beef grades, as well as the direction in which feeding has been going.

The large volume of cattle feeding helped to raise beef production to a record figure in 1956 and to maintain it at almost as high a level in 1957. Such output was attained not only because of the extra weight to which the fed cattle were carried but also because more calves were retained for feeding, instead of being slaughtered as calves.

During most previous cycles, calf slaughter rose sharply as total cattle numbers reached and passed their crest. During the present cycle, however, calf slaughter advanced until 1954 but remained almost stable afterward. A third more steers than calves were slaughtered under Federal inspection in 1957, whereas fewer steers than calves went to slaughter in 1947.

According to the AMS, since total cattle inventories are declining, decreases in the number slaughtered and in beef output can be expected for several years. On the other hand, if cattle feeding remains at a high level, the decline in beef output would be more moderate than has often occurred.

Beef supplies per person probably will not decrease nearly as much as they did in the preceding cycle, when per capita consumption declined to a low of 55 pounds in 1951. The low point in the present cycle may be around 75 pounds. (The peak rate was 84 pounds in 1956, followed by slightly less than 83 pounds in 1957.)

The AMS report points out that “If these prospects for supplies prove accurate, prices of cattle will not advance as much as in some earlier cycles. As of now, a runaway cattle price boom is not in sight.”

Since cattle feeding has been stimulated by declining feed prices, the future volume of this industry will depend, in part, upon the trend in feed prices. The volume of feeding probably will continue large or even expand, unless feed prices turn upward sharply. Moreover, expansion will be greatest in the newer feeding areas, if it conforms to recent patterns.

More Crop Insurance Available

The Federal Crop Insurance Corporation will celebrate its twentieth anniversary this year by providing a third of a million farm policyholders with a third of a billion dollars' worth of all-risk protection against crop disaster, according to the Texas Agricultural Extension Service. FCIC protection against loss of money invested in crop production, through unavoidable causes, is now available in over 800 counties in this country, or more than twice the number in which such insurance was offered in 1948.

The Corporation is initiating a new contract method this year which should make crop insurance available to a greater number of farmers. The procedure brings together a variety of crop insurance contracts into a uniform policy with separate endorsements for the crops insured. The new contract method will facilitate adding insurance for more crops in many counties to provide broader protection for policyholders.

Texas farmers can obtain additional information on Federal crop insurance by contacting O. B. Briggs, PMA Building, College Station, Texas.

Many persons who expect to remain in the dairy business must (1) double the amount of milk produced per acre and (2) triple or quadruple the amount produced per man-hour. This is a big order, but it is one that a progressive dairyman can fill, according to New Mexico A. & M. College.
Check Stored Grain Frequently

Spoilage and deterioration of grain can be very costly, points out C. F. Garner, Extension Entomologist with the Texas Agricultural Extension Service. Stored grain should be checked frequently to make sure that proper temperature and moisture levels are being maintained.

The outer portion of the stored grain is cooler than the middle; thus, warm air rises up the center. Moisture then accumulates in the top layer of the grain. The moisture content of this upper layer may be as much as 5 or 6 percent higher than the general moisture level of the grain when it was stored. Insects prefer the warmer temperature and migrate to the center, speeding up moisture accumulation in this area.

The entomologist says that the high moisture content of the grain may be reduced through proper use of an aeration system. Moisture and temperature can be maintained at even levels throughout the grain. Farmers who have no aeration facilities can stir the grain by elevating it from one bin to another, thereby reducing spoilage.

Pullorum and Typhoid on Increase in Texas

Reports from the three Poultry Diagnostic Laboratories of the Texas Agricultural Experiment Station indicate that pullorum and typhoid definitely are on the increase in the State. Bill Cawley, Texas Supervisor for the National Poultry Improvement Plan, warns that, because of the highly competitive nature of the broiler business, the rise in the incidence of these diseases can mean trouble for the State's broiler growers.

The method of blood testing for pullorum and typhoid is well known, and its value is well established. During the past 20 years, the National Poultry Improvement Plan has provided the procedures and standards for the tests, under which participants have achieved marked success in controlling both of these diseases, according to Mr. Cawley.

The supervisor points out that, on the part of some persons in the State's multimillion-dollar broiler industry, there has been a noticeable slackening in the blood-testing work. The tendency has been toward substituting drugs for blood testing. The reports from the Poultry Diagnostic Laboratories are proof of the failure of this method of prevention. During the past 7 years, only 8 to 10 incidences of pullorum and typhoid per year had been reported; however, between 85 and 90 incidences—mostly in chicks produced in hatcheries which were not members of the National Poultry Improvement Plan—were reported between July 1, 1957, and April 25, 1958.

Mr. Cawley urges poultrymen to take the necessary steps to restore the effective disease-control program which has existed in Texas for many years before serious outbreaks of pullorum and typhoid occur.

Don't Overfeed Grain in Poultry Rations

Feeding too much grain in poultry rations results in reduced growth and production of the birds and adversely affects feed conversion, warns B. L. Reid, Assistant Professor in the Department of Poultry Science of the Texas Agricultural Experiment Station. An all-mash starter, grower, or laying feed intended to be the sole ration of poultry should not be fed with grain, except on recommendation of the manufacturer.

Mr. Reid says that producers have a tendency to feed more grain than is recommended because this portion of the ration is cheap as compared with the concentrate. Such a dilution of the ration reduces the level of vitamins, minerals, and drugs which the birds receive. In a growing diet, the coccidiostat may be diluted to the extent of causing an outbreak of the disease, which is costly in loss of feed efficiency.

Prior to 1950, corn was the grain usually incorporated into poultry feeds. Since that time, milo output has more than doubled, and today this grain is considered equal to corn in
feeding value. Milo has the same energy content as corn and contains about 2 percent more protein.

According to Mr. Reid, the only disadvantage to the use of milo in poultry feeds is its lack of pigmentation value. Corn furnishes a small amount of yellow color for deposition in the shanks of broilers and in egg yolks; however, milo has no pigmentation value and should constitute no more than 50 to 75 percent of the grain portion of the diet.

Many poultry producers are using home-grown grains for poultry feeding, a practice which is advantageous if the grains are used properly. However, Mr. Reid points out that poultry growers should not overfeed grain just because it is cheap.

Safeguard Irrigation Power Plant Engine

Since an irrigation power plant must operate unattended for long periods of time, protective controls should be used to safeguard the engine against severe damage or burnouts, says Kenneth A. Koch, Assistant Engineering Specialist with the Louisiana Agricultural Extension Service.

These protective controls include a high-temperature cutout switch, which shuts down the plant when the water cooling system temperature reaches the danger point. Another switch should be placed in the main oil pressure line feeding the engine lubrication. When the pressure goes below the safe level, this switch turns off the engine.

Mr. Koch also recommends the installation of a pressure unit in the pump discharge line to turn off the engine if there is a line blowout or if the pump loses its prime or fails to function. On gasoline engine units, these controls operate on the ignition system; on diesel engines, they close a fuel valve to shut off the engine.

The specialist points out that these safety controls are relatively inexpensive. Their use often prevents the need for a complete overhauling or a new engine, and they eliminate long interruptions in irrigation resulting from engine failure.

Grass and weed control is the second highest cost item in producing a cotton crop, states Fred C. Elliott, Extension Cotton Specialist with the Texas Agricultural Extension Service. The cost can be reduced substantially by following recommended control practices. Detailed information may be obtained from local county agricultural agents.

Hog Rations — 1958 Versus 1908

The University of Minnesota recently conducted an experiment to determine the extent of improvement in swine feeding during the past 50 years. Results of a 62-day feeding trial showed that pigs on a modern ration gained 16 times as much as did those on a 1908 diet.

The average weight of the pigs at the beginning of the experiment was 33.5 pounds. At the end of the 62-day trial, the swine fed the 1957-58 ration weighed an average of 132.2 pounds, while those fed the 1908 diet weighed only 40.2 pounds each. The pigs fed the modern ration gained 1.6 pounds per day and required only 2.82 pounds of feed for each pound of gain. On the other hand, the pigs fed the 1908 diet gained an average of only 0.1 pound daily and required 13 pounds of feed for each pound of gain.

The 1957-58 ration used in the Minnesota experiment contained ground yellow corn, tankage, soybean oil meal, fish meal, ground limestone, steamed bone meal, high zinc trace element salt, and a vitamin-antibiotic premix. The 1908 ration consisted of ground yellow corn and a complex mineral mix.