

HIGHER PRODUCTION FROM OUR D A I R Y FARMS

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The discussion this evening is an extremely important one from many aspects. Probably we, as farmers, are apt to look mainly on the economic side without giving much thought to any other angle. Admittedly a practical farmer must run his farm as a sound business proposition, otherwise he is failing in his duty to his family and himself, but one must not forget that today, as never before, the welfare and economy of our country is dependent on what we as farmers are doing with our grasslands.

In no other country in the world are the essential factors concerned with increasing production from grassland being given greater consideration than in New Zealand. We are told that it is a practical possibility to produce 5001b. of butterfat per acre, and yet our national average is still little better than it was 20 years ago and stands at only 1401b. per acre. In the light of these figures it is nothing short of alarming to see huge areas of land in every district throughout the country where the potential has not been anywhere near reached.

A great deal of importance has been laid on improving our dairy herds by using proven sires, better strains of high producing stock, etc., and rightly so; but I still believe that the old saying "Half the breed goes in the mouth" is only too true.

Far too many pastures have reached the "age benefit" stage. Certainly they may have done their bit in years gone by, but when compared with the high-yielding, leafy strains of grasses and clovers that have been developed in recent years there is no more room for them than there is for the old scrub bull. A well-bred dairy cow is only half the story and to a large extent time and effort in breeding her is wasted unless pasturage of an equal pedigree is at her disposal for conversion into milk and butterfat.

Here another factor enters the picture, and that is soil fertility. To attain and maintain high-quality,

high-producing pastures, fertility must be of a high standard. Any elements that are deficient in the soil must be made good. The soil is like a banking institution. You are only able to draw to the extent that you have deposited, but nature is very liberal with her interest rate and one finds that once the fertility cycle has been started it is relatively easy to maintain.

Perhaps I could cite the case of my own property. Some 20 years ago, when it was taken over, it was, on the whole, a typical run-out place, ring fenced, with few subdivisions. The best pastures were those within easy reach of the milking shed, the rest ran back to bracken fern and blackberry. Today, through carrying out a policy of ploughing and reseeded, use of special-purpose pastures, liberal application of phosphate, potash, and lime, coupled with a strict system of rotational and rationed grazing, the most distant fields are undoubtedly the finest. Production has increased from 951b. per acre to about 3001b. I believe that with careful and efficient management it will continue to improve. Records kept last season showed that one field produced 4121b. fat, and I see no reason why most of the other pastures should not attain at least this figure. Admittedly the higher the production and the better the pasture plants the greater the need for extreme care and attention to detail. Efficient management becomes a very decisive factor.

Nevertheless, I am quite confident that the farmer of today is quite capable of surmounting problems as they arise. Furthermore it makes the business of farming more interesting.

Another real aid to our goal is the special-purpose pasture.

In my own case for example I have found that prairie grass is an extremely valuable adjunct for winter milk production. H.1 ryegrass and cocksfoot also seem to fit well into the plan if given the care and attention they need. It is here that the importance of efficient utilisation must be appreciated. It would appear that many dairy farms still face a very critical period in late winter and early spring. To my mind this points to lack of foresight and bad farming management.

Following an approved practice of conserving one-third of acreage for hay and silage, plus autumn-saved pasture in liberal quantity and efficiently utilised, seasons tend to level out to some extent, regardless of climatic conditions. The electric fence for controlled

grazing of autumn-saved pasture has helped more than anything else to give pastures a good early start in spring. Also it is agreed that grass needs plenty of spell between grazings to produce to the maximum and break grazing is the only way of using long-spelled pasture efficiently. I use the electric fence right through the season.

One other most important point is the ample provision of shelter. High-producing pastures are just as responsive to adequate protection from winter winds and summer heat as are the animals that graze on them.

In conclusion I would say this. Nowhere on this earth is there a country so blessed with a climate that is so suited to the growing of the greatest crop of all—grass. I believe we, as farmers, have a very great responsibility as trustees of the soil that the Creator has entrusted us with for the purpose of feeding a hungry world.

We in this land of plenty are apt to forget that not many thousand of miles away literally millions are starving to death.

Surely we cannot but do our utmost to produce to the maximum, making the fullest use of all that modern knowledge and science has given us.

DISCUSSION

Q. What is the strain of white clover used on your farm ?

A. In all my sowings I have used Certified New Zealand white of Pedigree origin. I feel that this clover is the key to my high production and soil fertility position on account of its vigour of growth and from its ability to stand up to the lenient grazing conditions of a dairy farm, especially under winter milk production.

Such dairy pastures are much more difficult to establish and maintain than sheep pastures. In my opinion New Zealand No. 1 white is really a No. 1—a real winner.

Q. What is your estimate of your extra production brought about by not wintering young stock?

A. Take it as an annual replacement of 20 per cent., and that a young beast will eat about 30 per cent. of the amount eaten by a mature milking animal.

Q. What harrowing do you practise ?

A. Only when supplements are being fed—silage, etc. The rest of the year the dung is soft and I think the worms, birds, and rain do the job for me. In the winter, however, the extra dung accumulations from the feeding are spread by light chain or tripod harrows.