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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 products of the dairying industry. 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 far economy to purchase the New Zealand brand for, 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 source 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 pasteurage was first approved by the use of ferrets. The North Island was not long in following this lead, and today over three times as much ferret 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 fertilisation, is 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 fertilisation 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 by the rigorous duty act, and by the
Dairy Produce General Regulations issued in 1938.

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 uncleanliness 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 water 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 specially directed 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 stalls, scrupulously clean, form their place.

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 new and important place in New Zealand then in any other dairy producing country. The increased fertility of the dairy farming land owing to scientific fertilisation, 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 insured 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 common pure breeds of cow in New Zealand at this 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 cows 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, medicines, 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 is not seen 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 pastures 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
milkery 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 milking, and this is the
next morning’s task. This entails the scraping and
cleaning 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 machinery polished and sterilised lunch
is ready. At four thirty the cattle must again be
brought into the byre for the afternoon milking.

This occupies another 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
cleared, the machinery washed and the cans put
out. This is not done until six thirty and then
the dairy farmer may sell the remainder of the
day’s milk.

In Winter, however, he has yet other tasks to
perform. Owing to the scarcity of grass, he must
purchase potatoes 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 potatoes and perhaps oats thereby reducing
his expenses 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 outdoor, 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 has never gone renowned for her dairy produce by the volume; the 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 undoubtedly 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 little 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 butter here, allow ALL produce butter and these under
practically identical conditions. The same regulations as apply to the production of butter apply also to cheese. At high standards of cleanliness prevail, 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 edam. Of these, swiss cheddar is made from either of the other two but in point of popularity it may not occupy first place. As is the case with New butter, we soon never attain renown for the quality of cheese produced in this 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 as it is itself, but of great importance to a country so relatively small as New Zealand. Foreign competitors are strong to improve the quality of their product while New Zealand, hurrying with self-confidence, confidently surveys the prospect of shortly losing her monopoly of the English market. In the methods of the present New Zealand authorities lie 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 depression, the future ahead of the dairying industry of New Zealand is indeed a bright one.
List of Books Consulted

Encyclopaedia Britannica XIV edition
Dairy Farming in New Zealand
New Zealand Year Book 1934
The New Zealand Stock & Station Journal
  January 1932
  April 1932
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The Auckland Weekly News
The Australasian