1-1-1961

Why poor prices for pigs?

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Why Poor Prices for Pigs?

A rapid increase in pig numbers and an unfavourable export situation have precipitated the present depression in the pig industry. Concentration on quality production and a gradual reduction in numbers should bring back a more stable situation, says Dairy Division pig specialist P. Beck.

Big fluctuations in the pig population—the basic cause of cycles of boom and depression in the industry—would be avoided if more farmers adopted a fixed farm level policy towards the industry.

In an attempt to arrive at some of the reasons for the depression the pig industry is now experiencing in Western Australia, it is necessary firstly to look at the pig population statistics released for the period concerned and to compare them with those released in the preceding period.

In doing so, it must be realised that the industry in this State is divided fairly sharply into two major categories:

- Pigs raised in the grain producing areas where they are in a large majority of cases treated only as a sideline, and
- Pigs raised in the butterfat areas where they are considered an important feature in the farm economy.

From this point of view the distribution of the pig population and its fluctuations within the areas which comprise these categories, must be considered a very important factor when trends in the industry are studied.

The pig population of this State for the Statistical year ended March 31, 1960, was 130,933. Of this total some 91,128 pigs, or 69 per cent. of the total, were situated in the Northern, Central and Southern Agricultural Divisions—the major grain producing areas. Of the remainder, 20,473 were situated in the main dairying areas, 12,740 in the Swan Division and the balance in the Metropolitan and North-West areas.

An interesting feature of this is that more than 35,000, or 78 per cent. of the increase occurred in the grain producing areas which now have approximately 71 per cent. of the total pig numbers. In the dairying areas the numbers increased to 25,253 and in the Swan Division to 16,537, with the balance in the Metropolitan and North-West areas.

It is also worth while noting that pig numbers have increased from 115,446 in 1959 by over one third to the present total of 175,675.

With the advent of the rapidly expanded pig population in Western Australia and the overall recent increase of 13.5 per cent. in pig numbers in Australia, the balance of exports, particularly from Western Australia to other Australian States has been adversely affected, and with this, so has the price structure at the producers' level. The West Australian export trade to the Eastern States during the July-September period was down on the corresponding period in 1960.

It is likely also that consumption of pigmeat all over Australia has been affected to a degree by the low price of lamb meat.

Just how prolonged the depressed State of the industry will be is difficult to determine. However, a gradual reduction in numbers whilst concentrating on quality production would be the pig raisers’ best means of returning the industry to a more stable situation. Any drastic and rapid
Quality should be the keynote in the West Australian pig industry. High quality carcasses like that on the left help maintain a more stable price for pigs, and gain a good reputation on our important export markets. Poor quality overfat carcasses like that on the right can only depress prices and give our pigmeat a poor reputation.

Pig raisers should have no difficulty in producing quality carcasses if they use good animals of recognised breeds, and follow the recommended feeding practices.

decrease in numbers at this stage would be unwise; it could quite feasibly upset the balance of supply in the next 12 to 18 months, and in doing so, the price structure could also become disproportionate, thus favouring the onset of another situation such as the pig industry is now experiencing.

Pig raisers must take a realistic attitude towards the industry if they are to help themselves to maintain a more stable production rate. The immense fluctuations in the pig population are entirely the result of the majority of producers having no fixed farm level policy towards the industry, which undoubtedly is a lucrative one if approached with the idea that what is good for the industry is reflected on to the producer.

It would also be as well to remember that the reputation of West Australian pigmeats both on the local and export market will have a great bearing on the well being of the pig industry in the State.

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