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THE OPEN RANGE SYSTEM OF PIG RAISING

By S. R. DUNSTAN, M.D.A., Technician, Dairying Division

There are several satisfactory systems which can be employed in planning a piggery, but under West Australian conditions, the paddock system has much to commend it. Grazing admits an animal to the healthy influences of sunlight and stimulates exercise. The digestive processes of the pig are also stimulated and this helps to bring about more efficient utilisation of the feed.

When locating a site for a piggery, it is advisable to select a well-drained area, not too close to buildings and yards. Regulations state that on dairy farms, the piggery should be situated at least 200 feet away from any milking shed, milk room or dairy.

With a heavy concentration of pigs over a long period, land eventually becomes "pig sick," and from the disease and husbandry point of view, it is desirable to use a layout on which the build up of worm egg and disease-causing organisms can be controlled. To overcome this difficulty the paddocks should be large enough to permit cultivation with modern implements, and sufficient paddocks should be provided to permit a rotation of at least four weeks or longer.

The land should be cropped during the resting period, and the greenfeed which becomes available is a supplement to the pigs' diet. Greenfeed is a valuable source of Vitamin A, which is frequently deficient in the diet of pigs, especially pregnant sows. Good quality pasture is also a valuable source of protein, and under good conditions can replace up to half of the meatmeal requirements of pigs over the suckling stage. Greenfeed alone is unsatisfactory for pigs because they are not ruminants and have a small type of stomach similar to that in humans; therefore, they require a concentrated type of food such as crushed grain, and a protein supplement. For the efficient utilisation of the feed, and to supply the "animal protein factor" deficient in other feeds, it is essential to supply some protein of animal origin.

Compared with an intensive system of raising the open range has the advantages of considerable savings, not only in feeding, but also in labour costs, as under grazing there is no cleaning out and removal of dung from the pens.

Pigs grazing on the open range system. In the background are portable shelters.
During the summer months it is important to provide adequate cooling facilities for the pigs, otherwise they will be uncomfortable, will eat less and therefore gain weight much slower than they otherwise might. Therefore, adequate shade and an easy access to an abundant and cool water supply should be provided, especially when white coloured pigs are raised. In all localities the provision of a cement wallow, or a spray system to cool the pens, would be a great advantage, but a badly drained and boggy pig yard does not constitute a wallow and is a breeding ground for disease. If shade is the only means of cooling the pigs, the trees should be protected from ringbarking by surrounding them with barbed wire.

The paddock system is very satisfactory providing there is adequate efficient fencing and the land is not overstocked, eventually to become a barren dustbowl. Even when a rotation is practised on a piggery under open range the stocking rate should not exceed two large sows and their progeny per acre or the equivalent in smaller pigs, and under most conditions, the stocking rate should be much lighter.

Under free-ranging conditions healthier animals may be produced with less trouble, and at reduced cost. It is, however, still necessary to provide shade and dry, water-proof shelters for best results. These may be portable if desired.

**TWINS FROM EIGHT-YEAR-OLD SEMEN**

The birth of twin heifer calves on a farm in Suffolk, from a cow inseminated with semen deep-frozen since 1952, is believed to be a world record in insemination.

The twins are the progeny of a British Friesland bull which stood at the Cambridge A.I. centre and died in 1956. The owner of the farm has just had 14 calves (six bulls and eight heifers) from 13 cows served with the last 13 ampoules of the season. He is rearing one of the bulls for the Cambridge A.I. centre.