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R.A. Bettenay

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Pigs on the Dairy Farm:

CUTTING COSTS TO MEET LOW PRICES

By R. BETTENAY, B.Sc. (Agric.), Adviser, Dairying Division

As all dairy farmers know, the market prices of pigs tends to fluctuate, depending on supply and demand, in a manner which is very hard to predict.

When (as at present) the price is low many dairy farmers decide that it is not profitable to keep pigs and sell their entire herds, thus adding to the number on the market and further reducing prices.

When the price returns to profitable levels, as it always seems to do within a couple of years, these farmers have to buy in again at high prices and are perhaps just geared up to maximum production in time to meet the next fall in price.

It is more logical to accept that fluctuations will occur and to maintain at least a breeding nucleus at all times. The annual turnover can then be influenced by the price ruling, and age at which pigs are sold can also be determined by demand.

At a time when prices are low there are several things which the dairy farmer can do to continue operating, although at a reduced margin.

These include:—

- Keeping less pigs and increasing the amount of skim milk fed to each pig;
- Making the maximum use of grazing;
- Feeding the cheapest purchased supplements available; and
- Marketing at an earlier age.

Skim Milk

When the price of pigs is high you can make the best use of skim milk by feeding half a gallon a day to each pig from weaning to baconer weight, so using it as a protein supplement and making maximum use of grain.

By reducing the number of pigs, you can feed more skim milk to each and so reduce the necessity for grain feeding, which requires money outlayed for its purchase.
Grazing

Maximum grazing should be available to pigs whether the price is high or low, but it is in a time of low prices that inefficiency cannot be tolerated, as there is little enough profit margin even to the efficient producer.

In practice this means having a series of paddocks grazed rotationally so that there is always young green feed available.

Purchased Feeds

At a time of low prices it is important to survey the field to see what purchased feeds are available and to buy the cheapest on a food unit basis, provided it is not too bulky for the pig's simple stomach to handle.

At today's grain prices maximum use should be made of oats, which is considerably cheaper than wheat on a food unit basis.

Weight for weight, approximately 7 lb. of oats is required to give the same food value as 6 lb. of wheat. On this basis oats at 6s. 0d. per 40 lb. bushel would be as good a buy as wheat at 10s. 6d. per 60 lb. bushel. Because of this price difference, oats could well be used to replace at least half of the wheat ration, particularly to the larger animals.

Where pig potatoes are available they are usually a good buy.