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PIGS HAVE A PLACE IN THE DAIRYING AREAS

By P. McNAMARA, Pig Husbandry Adviser

Pig-keeping could become a much more important feature on South-West dairy farms in the future with the enterprise as a definite farm-unit having a considerable effect on income. There are indications also that the collection of bulk skim milk and whey for pig feeding will increase in the future. This could make way for the efficient specialist operating large pig raising units close to the source of supply.

In this article, Pig Husbandry Adviser P. McNamara, B.A. (Cantab.) examines pig-keeping in the South-West and makes suggestions on the part that pigs can play on the modern dairy farm.

TRADITIONALLY, pigs have for many years been an adjunct to dairying, converting skim milk into a valuable product for sale and acting as a useful source of additional income. Pig prices have always been notorious for the manner in which they fluctuate, and this uncertainty has prevented stability in the industry; gluts and shortages recur regularly in three-yearly cycles.

Milk Markets Open to The Dairy Farmer

In the past, apart from a number of farms supplying whole milk for the metropolitan area, there was no alternative but to separate the milk on the farm, sell the butterfat and keep the skim milk. Today, the choice is wider and this has had an influence upon the pigkeeping pattern in the South-West.

The whole milk demand for the city and towns in other districts has increased and this market is much sought after by those who farm in areas close to the whole milk outlets. Pigs are seldom kept on these farms.

In recent years, more and more milk has been collected from farms as whole milk for manufacturing which means that there is no skim surplus for pig feeding on the farm. The farmer accepts the equivalent of about 2d. a gallon for his skim when selling this way.

In areas where there is no collection of whole milk the farmer must separate on the farm. It is on these farms that most pigs are kept.

A Place for Pigs

As mentioned earlier there are seldom any pigs on farms supplying fresh milk unless the farmer has a particular liking for them and runs a stud. When whole milk is collected by one of the manufacturing companies for processing into butter or cheese, the farmer again gives up pigs, accepting a small remuneration for his skim, and probably adding to the number of cows milked. It is on the farms where butterfat is still separated that there is an abundance of cheap food which will be wasted unless pigs or calves are raised.

Calf rearing has its attractions, especially if the farm has a large cleared acreage on which the weaned calves can be carried. Calves can be fitted into the system very easily and there is the advantage of channelling the enterprise into one type of stock.

Pigs are the alternative, and there is no doubt that a well run pig unit can be a very profitable secondary enterprise on this type of farm.

Pig-Keeping on Dairy Farms

On many farms, pigs are kept to clear up the skim milk and as long as they perform this task satisfactorily little more attention is paid to them. There is little doubt that pigs kept in this way perform a useful task, but their output is extremely small when measured against what a really good unit can produce.

Skim milk is a valuable food, but if fed ad lib as a total diet, it does not produce
an ideal carcase, and little use is made of its valuable protein content. The reason skim is fed in such large quantities is that pigs are mostly kept in such small units that in the flush period there are not enough pigs to consume it. Again, due to the size of unit, labour saving devices are not used, buildings are inadequate, and the whole set-up is on a make-shift basis.

If pigs are to make a substantial contribution to the income on the dairy farm they must be regarded as an important enterprise in their own right, using the skim milk from the dairy herd, but not being entirely dependent upon it for their existence.

Grain and meat meal must be bought in, a definite breeding and fattening programme worked out, and the unit run on systematic lines.

Size of Unit

Naturally, this will depend to some extent on the size of dairy herd, but this must not be the overruling factor because in many cases it will mean that too few pigs are kept.

Enough pigs should be kept to enable a reasonable return to be obtained on the capital invested in farrowing and fattening quarters, grain stores, and other fixed capital costs. None of these need be elaborate, but all must serve their purpose efficiently. One pig extra per litter will soon pay for a good farrowing pen even in a five sow herd, and the advantages of bulk buying of cereals are tremendous. Very often all milk is carried in buckets from the dairy to the pigs, whereas it could be cheaply piped, saving hours of labour. On farms where two or three sows only are kept, this is considered hardly worthwhile, but if the sows were stepped up to 10, or the fattening pigs from 25 to 100, the task would become impossible due to the time wasted carrying the milk.

A larger unit will encourage greater efficiency and give a better return thus enabling farmers to raise the whole standard of their farming practices.

Pattern of Dairy Farm Pig-Unit

Sows will be farrowed to benefit from the flush of milk which will gradually build up through the winter. The first litter is timed so that when the piglets are weaned there will be an increasing supply of skim for them to drink. This skim will be fed at perhaps a maximum of 1/4 gal. per pig, the rest of the pig’s diet being supplied by grain and grass. The second litter will arrive in time to use the end of the skim supply, but these will have to be sold at light weights or finished on grain and meatmeal. These pigs will be profitable only if fed a correct ration and not expected to thrive on water as a substitute for skim milk.

The sows will be in pig through part of the hot dry summer, and they cannot live satisfactorily on grain, water, and dry grass. It is of the utmost importance that these sows be fed a correctly balanced diet which is well supplemented with vitamins—vitamin A being especially needed during the summer.

Skim Milk and Whey from Factories

As more and more whole milk is collected for processing, supplies of skim milk and whey from factories is becoming available.

Surplus skim can either be dried for sale as dried skim milk or cleared by a contractor for pig feeding. Both these schemes now operate in the South-West, contracts being granted to keep the factory clear of skim milk. Such contracts give the operator a vast supply of skim milk at negligible cost, and it can be understood why it is used as a total diet in this case. Often the operator will need to tip surplus in the bush.

Whey is also removed by a contractor who guarantees to keep the factory clear. Whereas skim is a valuable protein, whey is very low in protein and a dilute form of carbohydrate.

Considerable capital is needed to set up a large piggery and buy the pigs to use these quantities of skim and whey. Difficulties are also encountered because of the sudden cessation of supplies at the end of the season. With a longer season, better feeding methods using limited cereals and more competition for supplies, this type of specialised piggery might well become a feature in the South-West.
The Future

There is a demand for good quality pigs from an increasing population in this State and from importing States in the East. The well run pig unit on the dairy farm can add considerably to the income from the unit as a whole, helping to bring the farmer a better standard of living.

If bulk collection of milk is to expand, and there is every indication that it will do, there will be a place for the efficient specialist who will operate a large unit in the vicinity of the factory. Unlike now, he will have to compete for his milk supply and will have to make use of its fullest potential. Protein feeds and grain will be bought in throughout the year in bulk lots.

From this it would appear that although the number of pigkeepers will decrease, the number of pigs could increase with a considerable improvement in quality.

Pig-keeping will still be a feature of the dairy farm, not just as an additional job that has to be done, but as a definite unit, the presence or absence of which would have a considerable effect on the farm income.

SKIM MILK FOR PIGS
Make the best use of it

PIGS can live on skim milk alone, according to Pig Husbandry Adviser, P. McNamara. But skim milk fed alone has little but cheapness to commend it.

The full value is not obtained from the milk because it is bulky and unbalanced, especially for young pigs.

Pigs fed solely on skim milk tend to have flabby and moist carcasses and their killing-out percentage is usually low.

Despite this hundreds of pigs are fed only skim milk because farmers feel that—"you can't afford to feed grain to pigs".

However, skim milk fed in conjunction with grain and grass is a diet hard to equal.

Plan your pig unit as a permanent feature and when skim milk is available use it to the best possible advantage. But don't be wholly dependent on it. If the skim milk supply runs out replace it with meat meal. Use your pigs to convert waste products such as skim milk and feed-potatoes into cash—but get the best out of these feeds by balancing them into a correct ration.
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