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### More Cows or More Care?

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## MORE COWS OR MORE CARE?

By Horace M. Jones, Extension Dairy Specialist



Care and equipment are just as essential as cows

A great many farmers undertake dairying on too large a scale, that is, they try to keep more cows than they are prepared to handle. Not long ago a certain farmer was milking 30 cows. He was getting 10 gallons of cream per week and declared that he was making money. An analysis of his case showed that he was not.

Ten gallons of cream usually contain about 25 pounds of butterfat. He was, therefore, getting about 100 pounds of butterfat per month, which at that time was worth about \$35. Thus each cow yielded a gross income of just a little over one dollar per month. The value of feed used was undoubtedly more than this amount.

When this was called to his attention he replied that his profit was represented by a calf from each cow once a year which he sold as beef. This failed to allow anything for labor, but he evaded the issue by saying that labor cost him nothing as he had a large family.

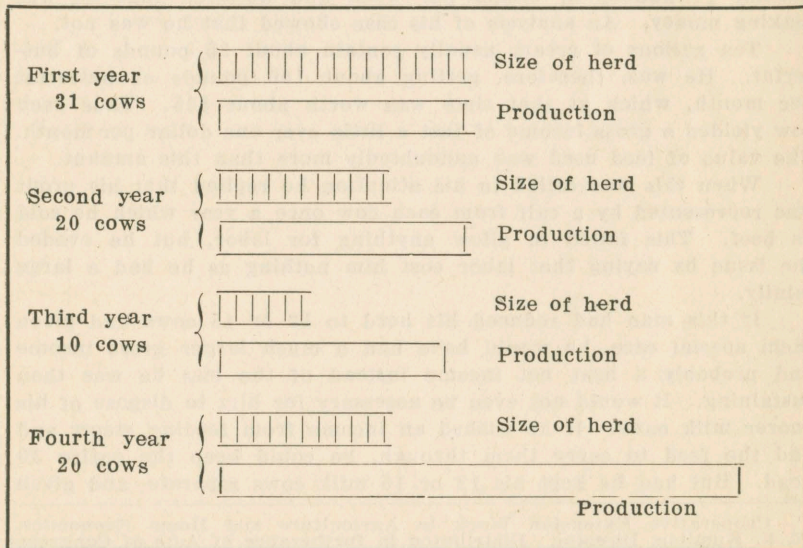
If this man had reduced his herd to 12 or 15 cows and given them special care, he would have had a much larger gross income and probably a neat net income instead of the loss he was then sustaining. It would not even be necessary for him to dispose of his poorer milk cows. If he wished an income from feeding steers and had the feed to carry them through, he could keep the entire 30 head. But had he kept his 12 or 15 milk cows separate, and given

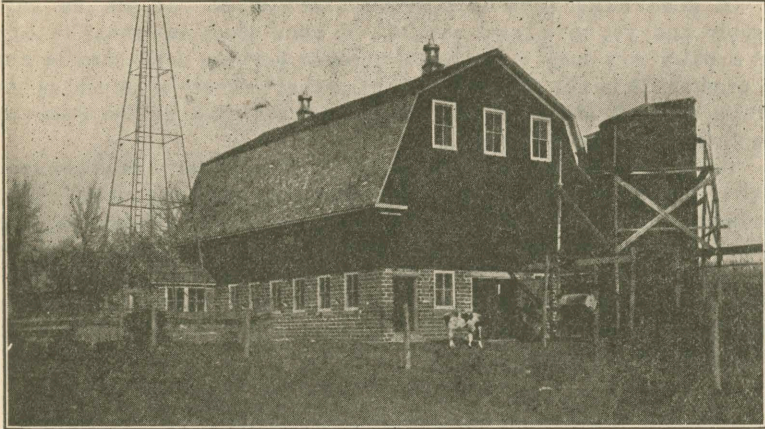
them the proper feed and care, he would have been making more money with less labor and at a lower feed cost.

A great many South Dakota farmers are in the same predicament as that of the man just described, trying to milk more cows than they are equipped to handle. It goes without saying that individual cows which are losing money should be weeded out as rapidly as they are detected. It is also true that even fairly good cows should be disposed of when their presence in the milking herd cuts down its efficiency.

What is the proper size of dairy herd for the average South Dakota farm? That depends upon the size of the farm and the amount of feed and labor available. It is generally conceded that any herd, to be highly profitable, should contain at least 12 cows. If the herd is any smaller than this, the milking is usually added to both ends of the day's work, an unsatisfactory arrangement. When there are 12 or more cows, milking becomes a regular part of the day's work. On the average farm, however, it is found that the number of dairy cows should not exceed 20 unless the farm has a considerable amount of help.

The history of a cow-testing association in Virginia shows what can be done by reducing the size of a herd. One member who started with 31 cows, cut his herd to 20 cows after a year of testing and with the additional feed and care which he was thus able to provide, his 20 cows produced more butterfat than his original 31. The third year he reduced his herd still further to only 10 cows and they produced almost as much as the original herd. The fourth year he increased the herd to 20 cows and their production was more than twice as great as that of the original herd.





Barn, silo and convenient water supply for economical dairying

Reducing the herd, however, is useless unless accompanied by better feeding and care of the cows retained. A dairy cow is an animal which produces most economically only when fed to her full capacity, and this is practically impossible on an overstocked farm. Feed, care, and water are of far more value to a dairy herd than increased numbers of cows.

The average dairy herd in South Dakota is small, about six cows, and therefore, less efficient than it might be. Many herds are too large and as a result equally inefficient, being more than the owner can handle properly. A great many herds just the right size are more profitable than the others. Nearly all of them have room for improvement in the matter of feed and care.

In order to carry on dairying successfully, one must be fully supplied with barn facilities. To be sure, there is a great deal of dairying done in cramped and unsatisfactory quarters, but it is questionable whether such a practice proves to be profitable in the long run. Success in dairying depends to just as great an extent upon having suitable stables as it does upon securing good cows and improving them.

By the statement that every dairyman should have a suitable barn, it is not meant to imply that a fortune should be invested in one. Under present conditions, it is doubtful whether any farmer is justified in incurring great expense for the erection of an elaborate dairy barn. The times demand that buildings be adequate and convenient but just as inexpensive as possible.

There are a few qualifications which make a barn a suitable place in which to keep a producing dairy herd. The most important are probably warmth, light, ventilation, sanitation, and convenience. Homemade contrivances will supply most of them and thus reduce the expense to a minimum.

A good dairy barn is a paying investment. It can be built cheaply and yet give good results. A good place in which to care for a dairy cow may mean the difference between large profits and no profits. It is not the cost of a barn that matters so much as the results which it gives. In a dairy barn there need not be elegance, but there must be efficiency.

Great progress has been made along lines of dairy improvement. Higher producing cows have been secured in many instances. Poor producing cows have been sent to the scrap heap. Better feed and care have been provided. Improvements have been made in barns. The results have been very good but there are still thousands of herds needing the readjustment in numbers and consequent improvement in care and housing which will cause them to reach their highest degree of efficiency.