LIVESTOCK FED FOR MARKET

Polk County has never been known as a “feed-lot” county for producing market cattle, sheep and hogs although surplus animals from the flocks and herds of the county have been sold for slaughter since pioneer days. While many farmers scattered throughout the county have on occasion fattened steers, hogs and lambs in sizeable numbers, it was not until the early forties that feed lots became a common sight. The livestock feeders, with their eyes on the corn feed-lots of southern Minnesota and Iowa, very largely ignored the two great surplus feed crops of the county, barley and potatoes, until the early forties. The government price support program on potatoes released culled and No. 2 potatoes practically free for livestock feeding.

Pioneer work in the feeding of potatoes to cattle done at the Northwest Experiment Station attracted nation-wide attention as to the value of potatoes in a feeding ration. Since that time, new varieties of corn of early maturity, corn driers to dry the corn in off years, pelleting of barley, pit and other silos have furnished all of the essentials for the successful feeding of cattle, sheep and swine in sizeable numbers. Feed lots are scattered throughout the county, the greatest concentration of feeding yards, however, occurs in the west half of the area. The short term feeding of lambs, cattle and hogs fits in well with the grain crop farms.

Taking a sample year from recent census reports we found that in 1955 in Polk County, 2,390 cattle, 3,882 sheep and lambs were fed for market and 2,772 sows were held for spring farrowing.

DAIRYING — AN IMPORTANT PHASE OF THE FARMING ENTERPRISE IN POLK COUNTY

The dairy cow was one of the indispensable farm animals brought into the county by the early settlers. Practically every farm had enough dairy cows to be self-sufficient for all their dairy product needs. While the farms of the prairie section were better adapted to grain farming, yet the small dairy herd furnished an income throughout the year in addition to supplying the family with essential food products. Eastern Polk County, with abundance of water, shelter and rich pasture grasses, has been better adapted to dairy farming than the open prairie section.

Farm surpluses of agricultural products has always been a problem in a rich agricultural county like Polk. The surplus problem with milk and cream became acute in the early 1900's. Unethical practices by centralizer creameries at the cream buying stations throughout the county hastened the organization of co-operative creameries throughout the county and brought about the organization of the Red River Valley Dairymens Association in 1903. Baggage truck loads of cream cans were a common sight at every railroad station. Cream station buyers and railway express men considered dairying in those early years an “exploding industry” because of the hot weather explosion of cream cans.