

YOUNG FARMER AND HOMEMAKER SERIES

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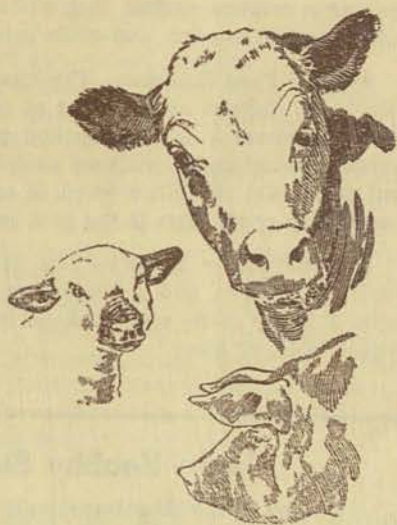
Y M W Circular 3

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Starting in Livestock Production

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General Conditions in the Livestock Business

Your success in starting in the livestock business depends on you. You must be up-to-date in the know-how of the business. You must be able to use skills and techniques farmers never dreamed possible 25 years ago. You must understand price trends and relationships. Above all, you must like livestock and enjoy working with them.

Here are some suggestions that may help you get a start in the livestock business. First, let's take a look at some general conditions.

★ **Your Farming Program**—On many farms, livestock is a necessary part of the farming program. On a large farm, if all your tillable land is in a surplus grain area, grain may be the best type of production.

On small farms, however—and this is where most beginners start—it may be best for you to operate with livestock as part of your business in order to get the necessary volume.

Livestock offers a market for the forages such as hay and pasture. Obviously, these forages help set up a crop rotation system that will maintain soil fertility, prevent erosion, and often increase crop yields.

★ **Your Feed Situation**—The kind of livestock you select will depend on the kind of feed you produce. In areas where a lot of hay and pasture is grown, consider roughage-consuming animals, such as beef and sheep. On the other hand, if corn production is heavy, hog production is the best bet.

★ **Your Labor Supply**—You must also consider labor. Beef, hogs, and sheep are best where labor is limited. Dairy cattle and chickens, on the other hand, require a lot of labor.

Have Healthy Stock

In any livestock enterprise, it is important to have healthy stock. A veterinarian can be a big help when you're starting a foundation herd or flock. He may detect things which could develop into trouble for you later—such things as indications of rhinitis, erysipelas, and brucellosis in hogs, brucellosis or bangs in cattle, and internal and external parasites in sheep. Testing assures you that the cattle purchased are free of tuberculosis and brucellosis.

WAYS OF STARTING

Beef



Build Your Own Herd

If you want to build up a herd, you can obtain stock in several ways. These include:

1. **Buying heifer calves or yearlings.** These are usually available in the fall from western ranges. You can get them at a central market or from a commission company. Western animals are usually well bred. They are of uniformly good beef type, well quartered with wide deep bodies. Such heifers, particularly calves, are open and usually disease free.

The disadvantage of buying young animals is that there is no income for nearly two years before they produce their first calves.

2. **Buying old range cows with calves at foot and rebred.** Frequently a commission company can obtain these for you on order. These cows often have several years of usefulness ahead of them. The rancher may sell them for one of many reasons. He may not have enough forage, his herd may have to range over a large area not suitable for older animals, or he may be replacing range cows with younger females raised in the herd.

Be sure to have these cows tested for tuberculosis and brucellosis. Since you will have to do this after you have paid for the cows, you do run the risk of loss if any are condemned.

3. **Buying grade cattle at home.** Often you can find good bred beef cows and open heifers in some locali-

SEASONALITY IN FEEDER CATTLE PRICES

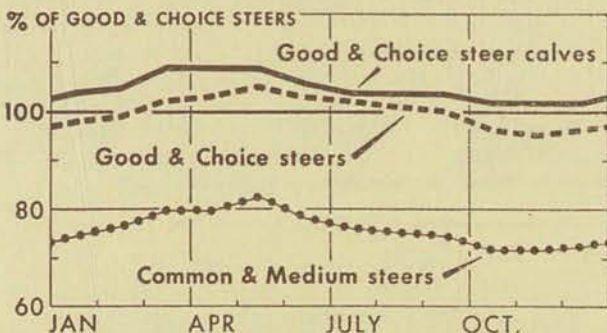


Fig. 1. Based on Kansas City prices, 1947-53. Note that feeder cattle prices are usually lowest in the fall and highest in the spring because of supplies on the markets.

SEASONALITY IN STEER PRICES

Corn Belt Slaughter Steers at Chicago

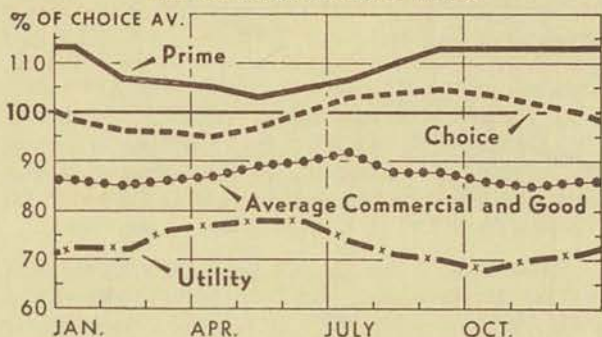


Fig. 2. Based on corn belt slaughter steers at Chicago, 1947-53. Note that the margin between high quality and lower grades of beef is narrower during late winter and spring than at any time during the year.

ties in Minnesota. You won't have to test these cattle because they probably have had a county tuberculosis and brucellosis test recently.

Such cows haven't the quality that the range cattle carry. Consequently, it will take you longer to grade them up to a good kind of beef herd.

In building your herd, no matter where you buy cattle, try to have calves born in the spring. This cuts costs because dry cows can be wintered on good quality roughage alone. Then calves might be fed out as baby beef the first winter. Or, they could be carried through the winter, pastured the second summer, and then fed out or sold as feeders.

No matter what you purchase, use high quality bulls. Figures obtained in a Michigan study for 1950 show that the feed cost for keeping a beef cow a year averaged \$48.00; one-third of this is for pasture. This is not the total cost of a calf, however. Other costs ran about \$39.00, making a total cost of \$87.00, which includes labor, interest, death loss, bull cost, buildings, salt, and minerals. All these figures assume that a 90 per cent calf crop was raised.

Buy Fattening Cattle

Fattening cattle, rather than building a herd, is another possibility. It, however, requires skill in buying, in feeding, and in judgment on when to market. It is a speculative enterprise because you, as the feeder, must judge what the outlook is for fed cattle several months or a year ahead.

Cattle feeding methods have changed. Many feeders (1) buy their cattle in the fall, (2) rough them through the winter on silage and hay with a little corn, (3) pasture them, usually with some corn feeding, and (4) finish them in the fall in dry lot.

Most feeders purchase calves for such a program. However, some feeders buy yearlings and follow the same program except that they may market directly from pasture with no dry lot feeding.

The charts on seasonal price trends give you a good idea as to when to buy feeders and when, on the average, to sell various grades of fed cattle.

WAYS OF STARTING



Hogs

There are several ways of starting in hogs including these:

1. **Buying bred gilts.** You could buy a few gilts early in the year ready to farrow in the spring. You would then select breeding stock from these first litters to increase your production for the following spring. These gilts could be rebred for fall litters.

2. **Buying gilts on a larger scale in the fall and breeding them for spring farrowing.**

Whatever way you decide, select meat-type breeding hogs—long-bodied and well muscled sows and boars. Meat-type hogs meet modern market demands and are just as economical to produce as the lard-type.

Crossbreeding

Most beginners can practice crossbreeding successfully. It gives more vigor and livability and efficiency in the pigs.

Some swine producers like to use a three-way cross, alternating each breed each breeding season.

For example, you might start with a boar of breed X, follow the next time with one of breed Y, and then follow this one with one of breed Z. You would use these breeds on gilts from the previous mating, regularly and in order—X, Y, Z.

Entirely different combinations might be used. You can make your selections in any of the breeds. The important thing is to get the meat-type hog.

Corn-Hog Ratio

You'll want to consider the corn-hog ratio when you go into the hog business. The corn-hog ratio simply is the number of bushels of corn 100 pounds of live hog will buy. The average ratio is 11. When it runs well above that, hog production goes up. It declines when the ratio is below 11.

SEASONALITY IN BARROW AND GILT PRICES

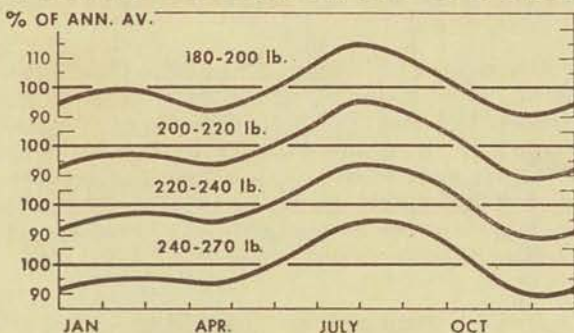


Fig. 3. Based on Chicago markets, 1947-53.

With hogs, it is important to watch market weights also. The 200-220 pound pig, as a rule, is the favorite on the market. If you sort your pigs to sell them at 200-220 pounds, you'll undoubtedly average a higher price than if you hold the pigs until all of them are ready for market. Of course, heavy hogs do occasionally sell as well as lighter pigs.

WAYS OF STARTING



Sheep

In sheep production, it is best to start with 25 to 50 ewes. Some producers do start with just a few head, using them as scavengers around the farm. Such a flock, however, does not get the good care and feeding that a larger, more economical unit receives.

You need 25 to 50 ewes to justify giving the sheep the same good care and attention that hogs, beef, or dairy cattle get. Unfortunately, sheep often get the poorest care and feed of any livestock simply because they are a minor enterprise.

You can start in the sheep business by buying either western or native ewes.

Western ewes are a good foundation for a farm flock. They are uniform in type and usually free from parasites and disease. Mated with medium-wooled or mutton-type rams, they will produce a thicker, more satisfactory mutton lamb.

If you choose older western ewes, be sure that they have good mouths and udders.

You do also want to check ewes carefully. Often fat ewes in the flock may be fat because they have not raised lambs.

Native ewes, too, may fit your needs. They will be thicker, more blocky because they have mutton breeding. You may find it hard, however, to obtain enough ewes from one flock for your needs. When you obtain ewes from several different sources, you may find that you do not have a uniform lot. In addition, there is a greater possibility of internal parasite infections in native ewes.

Practices to Consider

Crossbreeding is being practiced more and more by market lamb producers who want to obtain more size, better conformation, or increased wool yield. As with hogs, crossbreeding results in greater livability and thrift.

By lambing early, controlling parasites, and providing pasture, you can market lambs off grass by midsummer. You can hit the markets before the big runs of lambs start and prices break. To do this, you will need to creepfeed early lambs from the time they will eat until they go to pasture.

The use of heat lamps in lambing pens makes early lambing possible in cold weather. The lamps quickly dry off the newborn lambs, avoiding chilling.

The experience of the Spooner, Wisconsin Experimental Farm recently shows that sheep will pay with good feed, care, and management. Their 88 ewes bore 152 lambs. Of these, 140 lambs were raised. Sales of sheep and wool totaled \$3,024.71. Expenses such as pasture, hay, shearing, etc., totaled \$1,316.25, leaving a return for labor of \$1,708.46, after all expenses were paid.

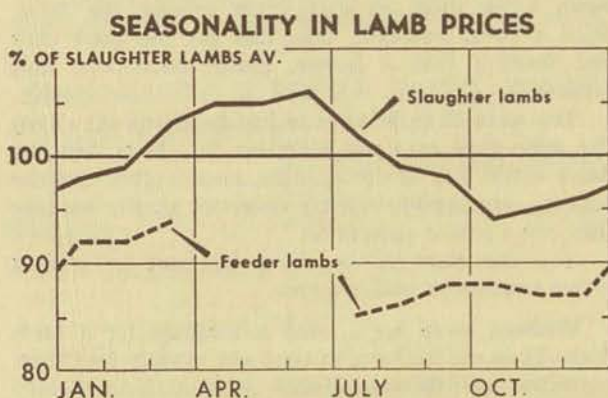


Fig. 4. Based on choice and prime slaughter lambs at Chicago and good and choice feeder lambs at Omaha, 1947-53. Note that early lambs marketed in early summer to midsummer can get the highest prices, because during this period the lowest supplies of the year are being marketed.

How was it done?

1. The flock was conditioned by flushing to increase fertility before breeding. They were given good pasture, plus a pound of grain per day for each ewe for two to three weeks before breeding. The result was 1.73 lambs born per ewe.
2. A low death rate in lambs born gave 1.59 lambs saved per ewe.
3. Parasites were controlled so the lambs finished for market on grass. See Extension Folder 147, *Livestock Pest Control*.

Many producers in Minnesota have as good a record of lambs saved and follow these same practices.

Commercial Production Best

Commercial (not purebred) production is best for the beginner. There is always a ready market for fat steers, hogs, and lambs. You, of course, must know the seasonal price trends for the kind of livestock you're raising and aim for that market.

The purebred business is a specialized business. It requires greater care in handling, developing, feeding, and selling. If you want to start in the purebred business you could start with one or two purebred brood animals and develop the purebred business along with the commercial business.

METHODS OF OBTAINING LIVESTOCK

You can start in the livestock business by: (1) using your own cash to buy foundation stock, (2) borrowing, or (3) renting on a share basis.

Cash—Buying your own livestock with cash, of course, may mean a small start. Here—it might be well to limit your operations to one or two species or kinds of livestock.

Borrowing—There are several sources of funds for borrowing to start in livestock production. More complete information on this is given in another circular in this YMW Series—YMW Circular 1, *When You Borrow Money*.

Share arrangement—It may be difficult for many beginning farmers to get the necessary credit from P.C.A., banks, etc. In this case, it may be better to start by renting a farm on a livestock-share lease, by renting land on a cash or share basis, or by entering a father-son partnership.

Livestock-share lease—Here the tenant furnishes labor and operating equipment and the owner one-half or all livestock, land, and buildings. These leases are often on a 50-50 basis. Both parties furnish half the seed and half the feed and share in any sales the same way.

A young tenant may feel he is using his labor to feed his landlord's share. At the same time, however, the landlord is helping finance the operation and is supplying the hay land and the pasture land without charge except for the tenant's share of the seed.

Renting—It is always possible to rent farms on a cash or crop share plan with cash for pasture and hay land. In some areas with crop-share arrangements tenants may pay rental on the buildings although the landlord usually supplies these.

Father-son partnerships often are splendid arrangements. Here, the son may manage a certain kind of livestock on the farm and obtain a share of the production. He thus establishes an equity he can later transfer to a place he is operating alone.

WHAT TO START WITH?

If you're starting in southern Minnesota where there is plenty of grain and where nearly everyone raises hogs, then you should consider hogs first.

In northern Minnesota, where there is more pasture and hay production and only limited grain production, it might be best to start with sheep.

You might start with beef cattle and sheep in southern Minnesota (or other areas) if your farm has a large amount of pasture and produces a lot of forage. This might even be true on farms where there is still opportunity to raise hogs because of the corn or grain production. Hogs provide a market for 50 per cent of the corn raised. Therefore, where corn can be raised to good advantage, hogs should be included in the livestock program. Beef cattle (cow herds), of course, require heavier investment and don't bring in returns as quickly as hogs or sheep.

HOUSING AND FENCING

Housing is always an important consideration for the beginning farmer. Beef cattle and sheep require little housing except protection from storms.

Sheep, of course, need shelter if lambing early. Heat lamps reduce the need for extra warm quarters. The important thing is a dry bed free from draft.

For hogs, portable equipment can be used. For hogs and sheep you can use old buildings, but for early farrowing, farrowing stalls and heat lamps are

necessary to protect young lambs and pigs until they can get a start.

Sheep and hogs require woven wire to control them. Woven wire, of course, is expensive.

If there is not a pasture such as alfalfa available, first year annual pasture crops can be used. Rye for early spring pasture is excellent. Rape makes an excellent pasture that can be used throughout the season if more than one pasture of this kind is available so rotation can be used to allow the crop to regrow. Sudangrass can be used, also, as an emergency pasture crop to good advantage.

Plenty of water is essential for successful livestock production.

For More Information

You can obtain more detailed information on livestock production and rental agreements in the following University of Minnesota publications:

- YMW Circular 1, *When You Borrow Money*
- Ext. Folder 37, *Fattening Lambs*
- Ext. Folder 90, *Care and Feeding of Brood Sows*
- Ext. Folder 109, *Wool Production*
- Ext. Folder 142, *Centralized Hog Plan*
- Ext. Folder 147, *Livestock Pest Control*
- Ext. Bulletin 119, *Hog Health Makes Wealth*
- Ext. Bulletin 141, *Sheep on Minnesota Farms*
- Ext. Bulletin 146, *Beef Production*
- Ext. Bulletin 207, *50-50 Livestock Share Leases*
- Ext. Bulletin 215, *Sheep Equipment*
- N. C. Reg. 14, *You Can Own Your Own Farm*
- N. C. Reg. 17, *Family Farm Operations*
- N. C. Reg. 18, *Farm Family Transfer Agreements*

Consult your county Extension agents. They will be glad to work with you on problems like those discussed in this brief circular. Visit them in the county Extension office or invite them to stop at your home or farm when in the vicinity. If you know of a few other couples in your community with similar interests, suggest that they, too, get in touch with your county Extension office.

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