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THESIS
METHODS OF STEER
FEEDING IN MICH.

F. L. WOODWORTH

1898

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Senior Agricultural Thesis

on

"METHODS OF STEER FEEDING IN MICHIGAN."

by

F. L. Woodworth,

Class of '98.

Michigan Agricultural College,

Agricultural College, Mich.

THESIS

METHODS OF STEER FEEDING IN MICHIGAN.

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Steer feeding in Michigan has become an industry of sufficient size to demand attention. All over the State men are devoting their whole time and attention to this Agricultural pursuit.

There has been a great deal of discussion in the farm papers and at Farmer's Institutes as to the best methods of steer feeding, but the methods suggested have been so contradictory, and made to suit such varied conditions, that little can be drawn from them.

I have tried to gather the methods of the best feeders in Michigan, and to find, if possible the one best practice in each of the many details that confront the practical feeder.

I secured the names of the best feeders by writing to the commission men in Buffalo and Chicago, and from the State Institute workers. Of course the list may exclude many of the best in the state, and include a few inferior feeders; but most of the names came to me recommended by several as first class feeders. The list is as follows:

L. D. Watkins,	Manchester,
W. C. Wildley,	Paw Paw,
F. R. Smith,	Somerset,
Jesse B. Cole,	Williamston,
S. D. Dennis,	"
O. D. Corwin,	"

W. M. Gaffney,	West Bay City,
Byron Bray,	Union City,
C. D. Chatfield,	Bay City,
F. Hart Smith,	Addison,
W. J. E. Wheeler,	Pulaski,
W. R. Drewett,	Commerce,
Jason Woodman,	Coldwater,
B. H. Sevison,	Constantine,
Cyrus G. Luce,	Coldwater,
C. R. Dodge,	Vandalia,
Cyrus L. Wilcox,	North Adams,
Watson Bros.,	Pulaski,
Wm. Dennis,	Williamston,
C. E. White,	Dowagiac,
Wm. Conley,	Marshall,
James Hogan,	Clinton,
John S. Flint,	Brooklyn,
William Wright,	North Adams,
J. W. Howard,	Pulaski,
Frank Garman,	Bronson,
Fred E. Randolph,	North Adams.

The questions were prepared with the assistance of Prof. Mumford, and sent to about sixty feeders. Answers were received from those named above.

I will give the results from each question separately.

Question 1. Of what breeds do you prefer grades for fattening?

Almost without exception the answers include the Shorthorn; many only mentioned this one breed. The majority

of the answers say "Any good beef breed," including in this the Shorthorn, Hereford and Angus. The general experience seems to be that any good well shaped steer of good size will do, but beef grades are preferred because they will sell better on account of their markings.

Question II. Do you Dehorn?

Seventy-five per cent of the answers were in the affirmative, and most of those that were not decidedly in favor of it would practice it under certain circumstances. F. Hart Smith answered: "I have practiced but little dehorning myself, but in purchasing steers for feeding, other things being equal, prefer steers without horns. - - - From observation would advise dehorning, if it could be done when young; not to exceed eighteen months old."

A few thought that the animal loses more by the operation than he gains. All say that the best time to dehorn is when young.

Question III. Do you tie them, or let them run loose?

The answers to this question varied greatly; about sixty per cent favored letting them run loose, and forty per cent tieing. Some of them said that if the animal was over a year old when bought, and had horns, he should be tied; but if hornless he should run loose. It was noticeable that the feeders who were in the business on the largest scale favored letting them run loose.

The majority favored keeping in a pen with mangers on sides.

Question IV. If you tie them, what kind of a tie and stall do you use?

The majority of those that made a practice of tieing

preferred a double stall and to tie with chains around the neck. About twelve per cent favored stantions, and fifteen per cent ropes around the horns.

Question V. How many times a day do you feed grain?

The answers were almost unanimous in favor of twice a day. About nine per cent said three times, and six per cent once; some used self feeders. Of course the number of times grain is fed is greatly influenced by the quality and quantity of rough feed, and the time of year during which the feeding operations are being carried on.

Question VI. What provision do you make for exercise?

The almost universal practice seems to be to keep the steers in until about 9 A. M., and let them run out in a small yard until about 4 P. M. A few only let them out to water; others let them out all day. All say that the state of the weather should, in a measure, decide the length of time the animal should be out.

Question VII. How much grain do you consider full feed for a two year old?

The general practice seems to be expressed in the often repeated answer "All he will eat clean." This amount varies very much in the minds of different feeders; of course it is influenced by the rough fodder to a great extent. The amounts given vary from ten quarts of corn meal to twenty-four quarts of corn and cob meal. Many feed corn and oats, the amount usually given being about twelve quarts.

Question VIII. Upon what kind of rough fodder do you mostly depend?

The great majority use corn stalks, usually with hay or straw. Those that use hay prefer clover.

This is one of the parts of steer feeding that brings in a profit. Most of the feeders depend on feeding a lot of unsalable rough feed, and thus getting some return from what would otherwise be a dead loss.

Question IX. Do you feed your grain ground or unground?

Forty-five per cent favored unground, forty per cent ground and fifteen per cent both.

Question X. Give briefly your experience in feeding ensilage.

Ninety-seven per cent of the various answers were "Never used it;" three per cent consider it the best winter feed. It was noticeable that those that favored it were dairymen as well as steer feeders; this probably accounts for their answers in favor of it.

Question XI. Give briefly your experience in feeding unhusked corn.

Thirty per cent had never used it, or considered it unprofitable and wasteful; fifteen per cent favored it for use in the early fall "to begin on", but considered it wasteful after that. Fifty-five per cent give it as the best feed; many use it almost exclusively. The usual method seems to be to leave the corn in the field till needed, then draw to the feeding place. Pigs are turned in behind the cattle, and they work over the dropping for the undigested grain. This is a practice that is in favor with most prominent feeders. It is said that a hog will gain two hundred pounds in one feeding season.

Question XII. What do you consider a good average daily gain?

The answers varies from one to three pounds; sixty per cent said two pounds, and seven per cent had never kept any figures to calculate from.

Question XIII. What age and weight of steers do you prefer?

Here there was a great divergence of opinion. The ages varied from one to three years, and the weights from seven hundred to twelve hundred pounds.

The majority favor a steer about two years old, and weighing one thousand pounds. A few who are feeding for the export trade prefer larger animals.

The practice seems to be to get just as large steers as possible that will be two years old in the spring. Of course those that feed to sell in the summer buy yearlings in the fall, winter them over, and sell when they are coming two.

Question XIV. In your judgment, how much does it cost to produce a pound of gain?

This question was not received with very great favor; it seemed to touch a sore spot; only about forty per cent answered the question definitely. Several said "Too much," or "more than you get for it;" but of those that answered the amount varied all the way from two to six cents. The average amount given was four and five tenths cents. The majority said that the cost "depends on price of feed."

I quote from Ex-Governor Cyrus G. Luce: "No feeder can give an exact answer to the question "How much does it cost to produce a pound of gain." I have fed corn when its market

value was one dollar (\$1.00) per bushel, and have fed it when its market value was sixteen cents."

Steer feeding is a peculiar business, the locality, market and many other things effect the methods so much that very few definite conclusions may be drawn. I corresponded at length with several of the most prominent feeders. One problem on which I found a great difference of opinion is the time to finish feeding. The majority agree with F. Hart Smith, from whom I quote: "I claim that there is no time in the year that beef cattle can be made so cheaply on the average Michigan farm as in the fall." Further, he says that this could be accomplished "by feeding plenty of shock corn at first, but after the corn becomes hard use corn and oat meal or corn meal and bran, or, better still, the three combined in say equal parts."

In writing and talking to these feeders, I tried to learn something of their business methods. Most of them have some commission man that they rely on to do their selling.

They have many methods of getting their steers to fatten. All agree that the money in steer feeding is in the buying. The effort is to get a steer that will take on weight easily. To get these they go to many different places; many go to the city stockyards and buy steers that have arrived there unfitted for market, some pick them up around the country anywhere they can get them, while others who have lots of pasture buy all the beef calves they can get cheap, and raise their own feeders. All agree that this is the most profitable way, in one has the conveniences.

None of the feeders seem to think that stock feeding is any short cut to wealth, but all agree with Cyrus G. Luce, who writes: "The truth is that the feeder must use broad judgment and discretion if he makes cattle feeding in this country pay expenses."

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