CUTTING CORNERS IN WARTIME LIVESTOCK PRODUCTION

E. T. ROBBINS

University of Illinois, Urbana

There are two main phases of the effort to cut corners in livestock production during wartime. First is the selection of feeds, which usually constitutes 60 to 85 per cent of the total cost of livestock production, and second is the labor.

SELECTION OF FEEDS

This year the supply of high-protein feeds is not equal to the demand. A generous use of pasture in summer and legume hay in winter helps very much to bridge this gap. Horses and colts, beef cow herds, sheep and lambs—all can be suitably nourished without purchased protein, provided they have good pasture or legume hay.

While young beef cattle being fattened respond well to the addition of a high-protein supplement to usual farm rations, they can nevertheless be fattened successfully without it if they have high-protein roughage. Cattle a year old or older fatten so well without additional protein that many successful feeders regularly give them only corn or other grains on pasture, or with clover or alfalfa hay.

The greatest problem is the hogs. Brood sows usually have somewhat stronger pigs if they receive one-fourth to one-half a pound daily of high-protein supplement during pregnancy, especially during the latter half of the period. Gilts have a greater need for this than do old sows. Some farmers now are breeding fall gilts to have their first litters in the fall when they are about one year of age. Thus these gilts have the favorable summer conditions during their first pregnancy. They will be older, more mature and better able to endure the less favorable winter conditions during their second pregnancy. Chester Heckathorn, LaSalle County, Illinois, uses this plan and fattens the sows for market during the summer after they have weaned their second litters.

Rye for pasture in winter and early spring provides protein and other factors which help brood sows go through the productive period with a minimum of other protein. Now since ceiling meat regulations have levelled off live hog prices to a large extent, there is little to gain by pushing early spring pigs for sale in early fall. Consequently there is now more of a tendency to breed sows for May and June pigs so that the regular permanent and rotation pastures offer their maximum support to sows during the nursing period. Such sows do surprisingly well with grain as the only other feed.

In these ways purchased protein may be practically eliminated from the rations of all meat animals excepting brood sows, pigs and young fattening hogs. Until they weigh 60 to 75 pounds, pigs respond so favorably to additional protein that most hog raisers attempt to supply it even during the pasture season. It is imperative for young pigs in winter. Without protein supplements in winter so many young pigs become unthrifty that few farmers would raise fall pigs.

Pasture for pigs gives best results if it is a legume crop such as alfalfa or clover, green and growing rapidly on fertile land. Pigs eat a maximum of such forage and it is high in nourishing value. At the University of Illinois, pigs weighing 51 pounds at the start of a test thrived so well on corn and good alfalfa pasture that they reached a weight of 200 pounds in 119 days, which was only 2 weeks longer than the time required for pigs fed corn and 0.27 pound daily of a mixture of tankage and soybean meal 2:1. In the two lots the same amount of total feed was required to produce 100 pounds of gain. This experiment illustrates the great value of good succulent pasture for pigs.

Labor

Ingenious labor-saving schemes cut the corners in caring for stock on many farms. The water system may be simplified. A good spring, a well-behaved creek, or a drainage ditch offers a cheap source of water. Tile supplies water on many Illinois farms. An arrangement by Frank Stout, Sangamon County, is typical. He dug down to a big line of tile, replaced some of the tile with a concrete trough, put a grating over the trough to keep out the hogs, made a sloping rough concrete slab down to it, and hogs and cattle drink there most of the year.

In many parts of Illinois, ponds have been used successfully for many years by using an outlet pipe below the pond bank. The pond is fenced, and the water from the pipe flows into a trough or is regulated by a float the year around. Fire for warming the water in stock tanks is eliminated on many farms by locating the tank well back from the entrance in the livestock shelter and insulating it with a partial lid and a covering of horse manure.

Handling hay can be simplified. Ed Kinsinger, Livingston County, Illinois, uses a buck rake mounted on a tractor to supply hay to a 25-foot overshot stacker. Two men and a boy stack alfalfa hay in the field very rapidly with this outfit. One two-year-old 10-ton stack was hauled in which had only one-fourth of a ton of damaged hay. Hay is hauled to the cattle as needed. A storage barn cannot compete with that. And furthermore, hay can be safely stacked containing more moisture than is safe for barn storage. Stacks almost never catch fire spontaneously. Even if one did burn, it would not destroy a barn, too.

Oscar Linn, Fulton County, Illinois, stacks alfalfa in the field, hauls corn out there for the cattle and feeds them right there on about a 10-acre area around each stack. The manure is thus already spread for the following corn crop. One cuts corners in handling hay or fodder if it is taken to the feed racks the first time it is loaded and hauled. A big percentage of hay is saved on some farms by using feeding racks from which the stock do not get the hay out under their feet.

Moving corn is avoided on some farms by storing it in temporary cribs in the rotation pasture field where stock is to be fattened the next summer. Much labor can be saved by feeding whole grain and hay. It does not pay to grind corn for hogs, nor for cattle if hogs follow them to clean up the waste. Grinding hay does not pay unless it can be stored and fed more conveniently that way. Thorough mixing of grains and supplements does not pay if one may judge by the good results on farms where little mixing is done. It is not necessary for the stock to have each mouthful taste like every other mouthful.

Self-feeders save much work in fattening cattle and hogs. Some hog raisers and some lamb feeders scatter ear corn in the pasture with a manure spreader, and their success is first class.

In using the sanitation system for raising hogs some men reduce the work very much. They scatter the clean houses about two rods apart in the clean pasture field, wash all the sows at one time and turn them in to help themselves to houses, feed and water. These men raise about seven or eight pigs per litter, the same as farmers who work much harder in managing each sow separately.

How one can cut corners in fitting livestock into the farm plan has been shown by Herman Radue, Henry County, Illinois. He bought 46 steers the third week of April, turned them into a rotation pasture of timothy, red clover, and sweet clover, and fed them corn. On August 15 he added a high-protein supplement, and on October 10 he removed them to the drylot. He topped the market with them in Chicago on October 31. The same year in the same pasture, he had 28 sows from which he raised and sold 196 pigs. He had no hay, bedding, or manure to haul. The stock spread manure over the field ready for the next corn crop. He has made his farm steadily more productive by this labor-saving system.

Finally, in cutting corners in livestock feeding one should use pasture and legume hay as much as possible to balance the rations for any kind of livestock. This is very effective so far as it goes. Then one should shape his methods to fit in with the natural instincts and inclinations of the stock so that they work for the farmer instead of keeping him busy working for them.