

# Replacement Stock for the Dairy Industry



IN the past few years dairy production has reached record levels. In 1946-47 total butterfat production was 408 million lb. from 1,658,000 cows. Two years later it had increased to 457 million lb. from 1,747,000 cows and in 1951-52 to 506 million lb. from 1,906,000 cows. Statistics of dairy cow numbers for 1952-53 are not yet available, but a forecast of production indicates that at least 535 million lb. will be reached. Between 1946-47 and 1951-52 production increased by 25 per cent. and cow numbers by only 15 per cent., which is reflected in the average production per cow: 243lb. in 1946-47 and 263lb. in 1951-52. For 1952-53 the average will probably exceed 270lb. per cow.

## Favourable Seasons

This is a remarkably high level to attain and it is clear that there has been a considerable improvement in the efficiency of the dairy industry in recent years. I think, however, that it is generally accepted in the industry that at least part of the increase in production in recent years has been due to favourable dairy seasons. The weather has been kind to dairying if not to other branches of farming. A study of the available statistics indicates that a major part of the increase of 30 million lb. of butterfat this season has been due to an increase in production per cow rather than to an increase in the number of cows.

## Decline in Heifers Reared

The figures I refer to are those of replacement dairy stock and unfortunately there has been a declining trend in the number of heifer calves reared in the past 3 years. In 1947, 365,000 dairy heifer calves were reared. By 1950 the corresponding figure was 410,000. In 1951 it was 407,000, and in 1952, 381,000.

It appears from a study of dairy heifer numbers in relation to dairy cow numbers that to obtain progressive increases in our dairy herd the number of heifer calves reared should be equal to about 22 per cent. of dairy cow numbers. This was about the average ratio between 1946 and 1950, but in 1951 it had dropped to 21.4 per cent. and in 1952 to 20.0 per cent. Had the 22 per cent. ratio been maintained, the number of dairy heifers reared in 1951 and 1952 would have been about 49,000 greater, which would have meant, allowing for losses, some 40,000 extra heifers coming into production this year and next.

## Unused Grass: Expensive Cows

It may be asked whether there is really a demand for the extra cows. One answer, of course, is to look at the quantities of unused grass seen about almost everywhere this season. A more concrete reply is found in the prices being paid for dairy cows. The increase in dairy cow prices has been much greater than the increase in the pay-out for butterfat over the same period.

Virgin land is being developed at the rate of 70,000 to 80,000 acres a year, of which a considerable proportion will no doubt be used for dairying. There is thus a considerable demand for young dairy stock from this source alone in addition to normal replacement and expansion of herds on developed farms.

In 1952 there were in New Zealand 35,654 herds of 10 cows or more. Thus if, on the average, every one of these farmers reared one more heifer calf, the prospective shortage of dairy cows would to a large extent be overcome.

## Early Weaning

I am aware that the costs of rearing a dairy heifer from birth to the commencement of the first lactation are considerable.

Research at the Department of Agriculture's Ruakura Animal Research Station has indicated, however, that if good pasture is provided, it is possible to wean calves at 8 weeks of age without any harmful effects and with a consequent saving of over 100 gallons of separated milk which could be diverted to pig-meat production. Alternatively the early weaning system makes calf rearing much easier on farms supplying milk for cheese, milk powder, or town supply where the rearing of replacements was formerly regarded as too difficult.

In any case the loss of butterfat through farms being understocked because of a shortage of dairy cows will far outweigh the costs of rearing additional replacement heifers.

## Dairying a Major Industry

Dairying is one of New Zealand's major industries. The total value of dairy production of all types in 1951-52 was approximately £90,000,000 and this year it will be about £100,000,000. The potential for increasing production is considerable and it would be a great pity if otherwise attainable increases were delayed by a serious shortage of dairy stock. I would therefore urge all dairy farmers who can possibly do so to make every effort to rear that extra calf or if possible those extra calves. It is an investment which I feel sure will be amply rewarded.

K. J. HOLYOAKE, Minister of Agriculture