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### Dairy Breeding Circuits on the Great Plains

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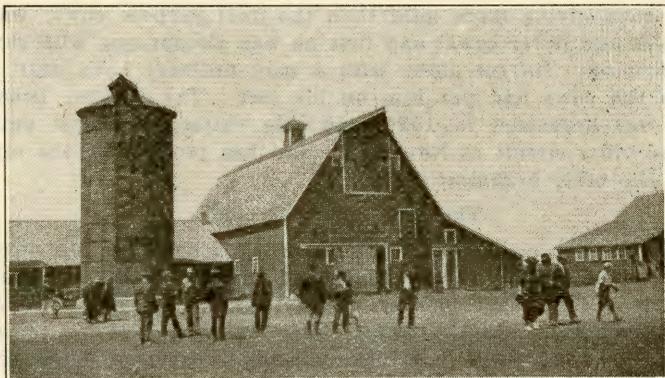
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**DAIRY BREEDING CIRCUITS ON THE GREAT PLAINS**

By Horace M. Jones, Extension Dairy Specialist



A typical farm in the New Salem Breeding Circuit

There is a popular belief that dairying is impractical, except as a comparatively unimportant side line, west of the Missouri river. While there are a great many individual farmers who have made a marked success of dairying in the Great Plains region of South Dakota there has been no widespread community project carried on for the purpose of adopting dairying as the main enterprise of the community. Two North Dakota communities, Flasher and New Salem, have organized themselves for the purpose of developing their dairy industry and building their dairy herds on a substantial basis with the idea of carrying it on permanently.

It was to get some insight into the methods they have employed and the results they have attained which prompted more than three hundred South Dakota farmers to spend two days in June, 1923, making a visit to these successful dairy breeding circuits of North Dakota. They returned enthusiastic over the idea and there will undoubtedly be a few communities adopting a similar program. What these farmers saw and heard on their trip is of interest to every farmer of the west river country, especially if he is carrying on any dairying.

**Typical Circuit Farm at Flasher**

Space does not permit of a detailed description of each farm on the circuit nor even of each farm visited. The typical farm, a sort

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of a composite of all farms on the circuit, would be about as follows: The owner came to the Flasher district about 1905 or 1906. He came there with the idea of becoming wealthy by growing wheat, and it was several years before he changed his mind in this respect, even though he realized that it was the cow which was paying his way and tiding him over the lean years. The average circuit member bought his first Holsteins about 1916, giving as reasons that he wanted cows giving more milk than the dual purpose cows; wanted more milk and fewer cows; and that he was discouraged with strictly grain farming. He got along with a very ordinary barn until such time as the cows had put him on his feet. The Flasher Breeding Circuit was organized in 1920, and was patterned almost entirely after the older circuit at New Salem and has profited by the experience of the older organization.

### **The New Salem Circuit**

The New Salem Circuit consists of 17 members. Its development, although begun earlier than that in the Flasher community, has been slower. The country was settled in the 80's, and their early attempts at grain growing were quite similar to those at Flasher. In 1896 they undertook dairying in earnest, building the New Salem cooperative creamery at that time and the inland creamery at Youngtown two years later. From that time on they gradually acquired better cows and in a limited way improved their herds through the introduction of new blood.

It was 12 years later before they were organized for the purpose of improving their herds systematically through the operation of a breeding circuit. They were organized at that time (1909) by the United States Department of Agriculture working in cooperation with the North Dakota Agricultural college and under the direct supervision of Professor J. H. Shepperd, who is looked upon as the father of the circuit. Since that date close attention has been given to cooperative cow testing and joint ownership of bulls. The results of the last 10 years under the reign of cooperative effort have been many times what they were during the 20 years of individual effort which preceded it.

### **Foundation Has Been Cooperation**

All that has been accomplished along the line of dairy cattle improvement both at Flasher and New Salem is due almost entirely to the hearty spirit of cooperation into which all members of the circuits have entered. Aside from their activities in improving their dairy cattle, these men are also taking advantage of cooperation in almost every detail of their farm work. For example, eight milking machines were bought at one time at wholesale price, eight silos were bought cooperatively and the foundations let in one contract, nine-men threshing rigs are the rule and five-men silo filling outfits. Four members lease a school section together and each one uses a gate on his side of the pasture. It is cooperation of this kind which has contributed so largely to the success of the circuit. Any com-



Cooperative cow pasture near New Salem, North Dakota

munity which undertakes to duplicate the record of Flasher and New Salem must bear this in mind.

#### Why New Salem Was Chosen

In reply to the question, "Why was New Salem chosen as the place for such a circuit?" Professor Shepperd has the following to say: "New Salem was chosen as the location for the circuit because the community looked like it would cooperate. The Holstein breed was adopted for the work because the community was breeding that kind. Guernseys, Jerseys or Ayrshires would have been adopted with equal alacrity if there had been an equally promising group of cooperating Great Plains men behind them.

"A picnic meeting in midsummer and an annual business meeting are the outstanding circuit session of the year. You are sampling a summer meeting today, and while the first two were of much lighter attendance, we have always invited the neighbors and have always had a program of talks, music and a picnic dinner. Yes! and we had a cow judging contest at the very first meeting."

#### Would South Dakota Succeed?

Would dairy farming as practiced by the circuit members of North Dakota be equally well applicable to conditions in South Dakota? There is no reason why it would not. In fact there are a number of places in South Dakota in which there is already more of a beginning in dairy cattle than there was either at Flasher or New Salem at the time they undertook their circuit work. As a rule South Dakota is favored with climatic and soil conditions superior to those in the Flasher and New Salem districts. Nearly everyone who made the trip from South Dakota came home with that impression. Alfalfa and corn make more and better growth in most localities in South Dakota than in the two communities just cited. There are at least six communities in the northwestern counties of South Dakota which would make a success of such a venture if they would put their shoulders to the wheel and push.

### What Sort of a Community Will Succeed?

There are several qualifications which the people of a community must have before they are warranted in organizing a breeding circuit, chiefly:

1. To forget personal gain and to work for the advancement of the community as a whole.
2. To agree on one breed of cattle and stay by that breed.
3. To furnish the capital and labor necessary to provide suitable barns, buy purebred bulls, care for the cows, and hire a manager cooperatively.
4. To grow the right kind of feeds.
5. To keep up courage even if, after a year or two, results are not so pronounced as those seen at Flasher and New Salem. They have been years in the making.
6. A suitable market for cream or other dairy products.

### What Steps Should Be Taken to Start One?

If you are convinced that your community is in position to undertake the organization of a dairy breeding circuit, consult several of your neighbors. If they respond favorably correspond with your county agent or the extension dairy specialist at Brookings and ask their cooperation. A survey will be conducted to find how widespread the interest is and explain the operation of the circuit to prospective members, calling a meeting for that purpose if necessary. Then, if in the opinion of those most interested, there seems to be enough interest to carry the thing through, the organization will be perfected and memberships solicited. The next step will be to decide on the breed and buy some purebred bulls. When the time is ripe a manager will be secured for the association and the testing and sale of surplus cattle will be turned over to him. It must be remembered, however, that the duties of the members do not cease with the hiring of a manager. They must support him constantly. It is only with the cooperation of each and every member at all times that an organization like this can be made a success.