

SAVE THE HEIFER CALVES

Suggestion from the Bay of Plenty

THE appeal to farmers to save their heifer calves as part of the *Aid to Britain* campaign has brought us an interesting communication from the Bay of Plenty. J. Armstrong, a dairy farmer living near Opotiki, suggests that, if farmers are not able to feed all the calves that should be reared, these should be bought by the Government and run on undeveloped Government land until they come into production, and that the pool of dairy stock so formed should then be re-sold to farmers at prices they could afford to pay.

Mr. Armstrong, who claims that his first thought on the subject of herd improvement was prompted by Lord Bledisloe's speech as far back as in 1933, when he deplored the fact that the average production was as low as 200lb. per cow, claims that his scheme is simple and workable, particularly now that so many of the men from the fighting forces are indicating their desire to go on the land.

Slaughter of the Innocents

"In view of the fact that there are many herds averaging well over 300lb. fat, it can be readily seen that in New Zealand there are thousands of farmers milking thousands of what can only be described as 'duds.' A farmer from the Waikato recently stated that from his herd averaging over 300lb. butterfat he reared only his marked calves, and sold the other heifers as 'bobbies' at a few shillings per head.

"Here was a case of calves from perfectly good producing cows who returned just a few shillings to the breeder. But it is a typical case and the fact remains that annually we are killing off tens of thousands of potentially good producing cows merely because they are not from top-notch dams. A more short-sighted policy could scarcely be imagined, for in the 'bobby calf' season we destroy the one and only direct means of building up our production, while we are content to go on milking thousands of genuinely unprofitable cows.

"There is surely a remedy to overcome such repeated folly.

Value of Herd Testing

"The primary step to correct the present uneconomic drift would be to impose a compulsory herd test in all bona fide supplying herds. At the present time testing is on a voluntary basis and the majority of general suppliers do not bother. Either they are not fully alive to the benefits which accrue, or else they honestly cannot afford it. But place the test sheet before their eyes, where it is shown that 'Smoky' gives 465lb. and 'Lucy,' the favourite, gives only 140lb. They would soon wake up!

"If compulsory testing was introduced, either by Government assistance or through the Dairy Factories dealing with their individual suppliers, it would at one sweep overcome the apathy which has hitherto been the main stumbling

block to the industry. Government Stock Inspectors could operate with the testing officials and mark with the broad arrow, as culls, all cows not coming up to a standard of say—200lb. for a start. The standard could be hardened as time went on.

Safeguarding Farmers

"It would be necessary to mark all such cows, for they are all too often passed on at the local sales, and the unsuspecting buyer is the next victim, until he too wakes up. By carrying the condemned mark each beast would advertise its own shortcomings and thus farmers would be protected.

"Some farmers who are knowingly milking cows not up to standard are simply not financial enough to buy better stock to replace them. I suggest that the Government, with its large areas of unimproved Crown lands in different parts of the country, should improve these blocks sufficiently to carry young stock. Instead of the thousands of potential good producing cows going to Horotiu and Westfield in the 'bobby calf' trade, Government buyers could purchase the cream of the calves from proved herds. These marked calves could be raised and grazed on those blocks under proper care and supervision, and sold back to farmers to replace their condemned culls each successive dairy season, under the direction of the resident Stock Inspector.

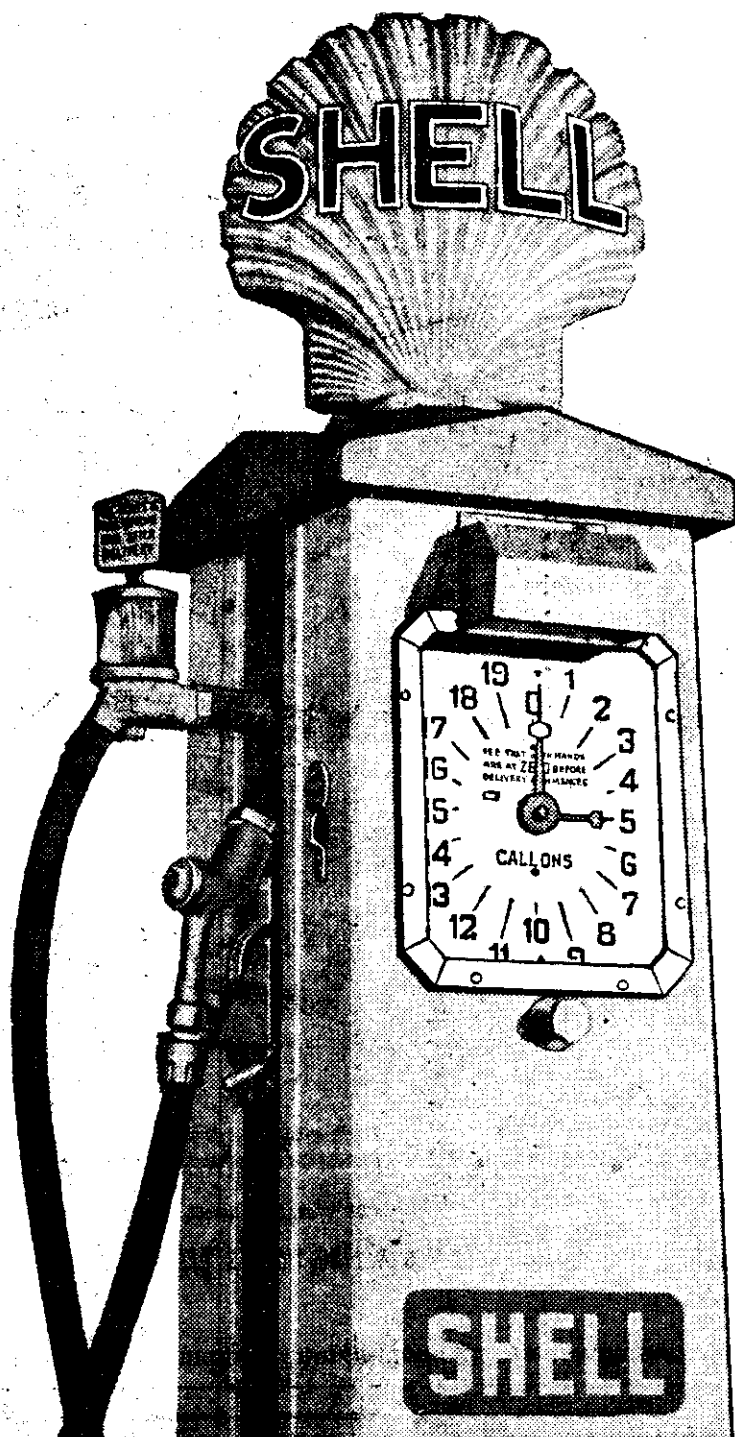
"The culls could be purchased to offset the price of the younger stock or disposed of at market rates. The main consideration is of course to get them out of the milking sheds, and to have them replaced by proven cows of quality.

"Farmers would gladly rear their own calves if they were assured of a reasonably good return for them as heifers. The proceeds of the sales of these replace calves would be a welcome addition to their income.

Profitable Scheme for State

"Should the scheme be adopted by the Government it could not help but be a source of profitable income for the State. Besides bringing in large tracts of Crown land at present lying idle, it would mean that even at reasonable prices a handsome turnover could be made from the re-sale of the calves which are hitherto only serving the 'bobby' trade. It would mean too that the production of butterfat would over a few years be possibly doubled and the added income would mean much to the Dominion as a whole.

"Large Government-held areas in the Rotorua and Bay of Plenty districts would make excellent accommodation for such a pooling scheme as outlined, while there are others in North Auckland and in Hawke's Bay. These are particularly suited to winter on, and are all handy to large dairying settlements into which they could be drafted as they were required."



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