

# FARMING THE UPLANDS

## Importance to National Economy

"IN my opinion there are two things which—more than anything else—would put hill country farming in New Zealand back on its feet. They are, first, the freeing from direct taxation of all moneys spent on re-establishing land that has gone out of production, and secondly, the provision of adequate housing in outlying districts to encourage the settlement of married shepherds." This statement was made to *The Listener* by A. B. Duncan, Chairman of the Galloway Cattle Breeding Society of Great Britain, on the eve of his return to Scotland after a two-and-a-half

created by the expulsion of the crofters in the 19th Century, when small sheep and cattle holdings were wiped out in order to form big sheep runs—not deer forests as was commonly supposed. Widespread erosion had resulted from over-grazing sheep and under-grazing cattle in this way, but by building up cattle herds again and cutting down the number of sheep, they had done much to overcome the problem. Further, they had found in Scotland that this needed to be only a temporary measure, as the cattle so improved the hills that after a few years the original number of sheep could be successfully grazed, together with the cattle that had been added.

Comparing hill farming conditions here with those in Scotland, Mr. Duncan said that the sheep industry there was based on two mountain breeds, the Scots Blackface and the Cheviot, the former being used under the very worst conditions, and the latter on the more grassy hills. In the beef cattle industry Scottish farmers believed that with their great triumvirate of the Shorthorn, the Aberdeen-Angus, and the Galloway they had three of the finest beef breeds in the world.

### Beef Production

"In general terms it can be said that no policy of beef production can long succeed unless there is Scottish short-horn blood somewhere near the fountain head," he said. "The Aberdeen-Angus we regard in much the same way as you regard the Southdown ram—as a crossing sire for the production of a smaller joint and high quality, but it is to the Galloway that we look to produce calves of high quality upon our hills and rough grazings."

Although there was only one example of the Galloway breed in New Zealand at present, more were being sent out. They were black or dun in colour with a polled head, a thick, well-fleshed and low-set body, sufficient bone to carry a fine carcass of deep flesh and thick, pliable skin, and an outer covering of long hair in the winter (with an undercoat of soft warm fluffy hair) sufficient to turn the most severe weather they encountered on their bleak native hills.

"These cattle have been bred from time immemorial on the southern uplands of Scotland and the northern uplands of England," he said. "In a country such as New Zealand, where cattle on the hills are used so largely to keep the ground in condition for sheep, they would, I believe, prove invaluable. They are active, hardy of constitution, long-lived, and provide the very choicest of beef."

The upland farmers of New Zealand had an important part to play in the country's economy, Mr. Duncan concluded, and he believed that by the freeing of capital expenditure from taxation, the attraction of married men into the industry, and the greater use of certain hill breeds of stock, they would be able to play that part more effectively in the future.

While he was in Wellington, Mr. Duncan recorded two talks in which he described his impressions of farming in New Zealand. The first will be broadcast from 2YA at 12.35 p.m., on Thursday, April 15.

### Overcoming Erosion

Erosion problems in the back country here were much the same as in Scotland, he said, although at Home erosion was on a much smaller scale. The problem there had been

months' visit to this country. While in New Zealand Mr. Duncan gave evidence before the Commission of Inquiry into hill country farming.

"By and large hill farming conditions in New Zealand are not so rigorous as they are in Scotland," Mr. Duncan said. "There is much more dry farming for one thing, but there is also much more waste land here. In Scotland, where the Hill Farming Act was recently passed as a result of a Hill Sheep Commission set up a few years ago, farmers now get a grant of up to 50% for capital expended on putting a particular farm, or block of farms, back into first-class order. This is granted only on a completely comprehensive scheme that includes housing, roading, drains, and so on. In addition, all capital thus spent on re-equipping land can be written off for taxation purposes over a period of 10 years. This is a concession allowed to business firms, so why should the farmer not get the benefit of it too?"

Referring to the labour shortage on hill country farms, Mr. Duncan said that although the agricultural industry had in the past relied to a great extent on single men, that day was now past, and if the labour problem was to be solved it must be along the lines of more families settled in the country. This meant more and better housing in the country, and more and better facilities for people in the country.



A. B. DUNCAN

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