

COWS GET FRUSTRATED TOO!

American Scientist Discusses the Social Problems of Dairy Herds

THE proportion of New Zealanders for whom cows are a matter of intense personal preoccupation is probably higher than that for any other people in the world—with the possible exception of the Danes. The latest official year book reveals that there are about one and three-quarter million dairy cows in milk in New Zealand, or putting it another way, a milking cow to every man, woman and child in the country. Thousands of men (and women and children too) have a more lengthy and intimate contact with cows (by spending some six hours a day milking them, and a few more feeding them and generally shifting them around the farm) than most other people have with the objects of their trades, professions, or callings.

A dairy herd may average anything from 30 to 100 cows or more, and the men who milk these herds soon get to know the physical peculiarities of each cow-member of them. In most cases each cow has a name (although it won't always answer to it), and to the accustomed eye, is easily distinguishable from its neighbours. But cows also have their psychological differences. As Professor W. E. Petersen, of Minnesota, the world-renowned authority on milking technique, milk secretion, and dairy-cow psychology who is at present in New Zealand on a lecture tour, said in a recent broadcast, "The cow is a most interesting animal as an individual. But I think farmers and people in general have not recognised the cow as an individual, or understood how she behaves. We know that she is the most economical animal in the world, in converting foodstuffs that cannot be used by human beings into the most valuable food products. But that isn't all. . . ."

Although Professor Petersen went on to talk on that occasion about milking techniques, *The Listener* decided to interview him last week on the question of the cow as an individual and how she behaves.

A big, bluff, genial man who smokes a pipe with a half-ounce bowl, the Professor at first pooh-pooed the idea that he was really a specialist in bovine psychology. It was not his special line, he said. For one thing, he had not put in a sufficient amount of research on it. But he was interested in the behaviour of cows as it affected milking techniques, and he had studied cow psychology from the psycho-somatic point of view—that is (as he put it) the consideration of "psychic effects upon the somatic or control system of the cow and its udder." He also had a few observations to make on the general behaviour of cows.

People who were not dairy farmers might not know, he said, that the cows in a dairy herd arrange themselves in a definite social order. First there is the queen cow—a sort of supreme commander. She is the one who is always out in front when the herd is ambling towards the shed at milking time; she is the one who always goes first into the bails, is first to be milked, and is first to get out to that delectable hay laid out in the adjoining night paddock. And after the queen comes the number two cow; and after her number three; and so on down the social scale to the lowliest cow in the herd, number 35 or 99 or whatever her number is. This poor cow is the sorrowing victim, often literally the butt, of all the other cows in the herd. She stands around disconsolately at milking time, waiting patiently for her turn, butted by the others, pushed against the rails, kicked into a corner, prodded by the horns of every Daisy or Strawberry who wants to work off a petty spite.

Once this social hierarchy is established, it becomes very difficult to break. The cows *should* get accustomed to their lot. But—and it's an important but—cows, being feminine, are also social climbers. They want to improve their position on the social register, and continually feel they have to "keep up with the Joneses." Unfortunately social aspirations are often frustrated, and in many cases cows in the middle of the social order will become psychologically maladjusted and neurotic. They will develop frustration complexes just as humans do, simply because they have hopes of belonging to a higher social order but haven't got what it takes to get them there.

How do frustrated cows behave? Like humans, they become difficult subjects to manage, Professor Petersen said. They become more excitable than their fellows, and stir up trouble in the herd. They become refractory at milking time.

"I have seen a new cow—one with presumably a fairly good social standing in her previous environment—come into a herd, start physical combats with her new companions, find she can only get up a certain number of rungs in the social ladder, and suddenly go all to pieces and become impossible to handle."



PROFESSOR W. E. PETERSEN
"Many cows become psychologically maladjusted"

Then a dairy farmer also has to consider the problem of adjustment to the human element. Cows may be well adjusted to their own social order, but badly adjusted to humans because of maltreatment. Hence we get claims made by some farmers—in Scotland, for instance—that certain people can get better results with cows than others. Professor Petersen said he had with him a film that traced the history of one particular cow from which a certain man

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