

THERE IS ALWAYS A WAR ON A FARM

*The Man On The Land Is His Own
Man-Power Committee*

By "THID"

"GIVE us milk!" cry the housewives. "Give us cream, give us butter, give us eggs, give us cheese!" And the retailers, the schools, the city milk suppliers, and the exporters, and the dairy factories, and the ships, and the nations overseas, and the government at home.

And so the dairy farmer gets up early in the morning and goes to bed late at night and by Heaven they get their milk and their butter and their cream and eggs and cheese, for which they pay good money . . . but not so expensively as the dairy farmer pays in his sweat and the rheumatics of his joints and the toil of his wife and his children and in the years that go by in a set pace of milkings every morning and evening and ploughings in autumn and spring and seeing the turnips come away and putting the cows on them until there is only a hardbake field with brown dead leaves trampled underfoot beside the rusty munched tops of the roots.

Again The Cry Goes Up

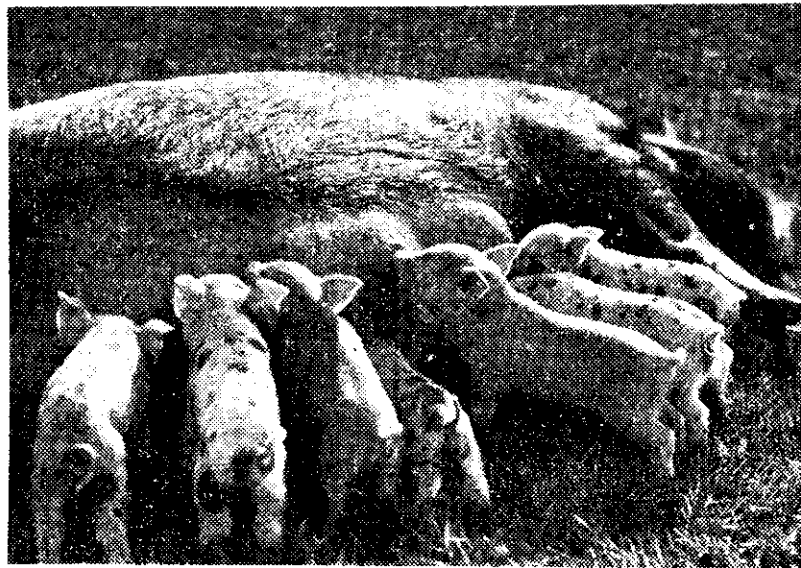
Then a war comes, and the dairy farmer hears them again:

"Give us more milk!" cry the housewives and the factories and the schools and the soldiers in the camps and the exporters and the government and the Reserve Bank and the ships and the nations overseas. " . . . and cheese and butter and eggs."

And so the farmer gets up a little earlier in the morning and goes to bed a little later at night so that he can put more super on that grazed-over paddock and cart more swill from the byre to those bare patches in the new pasture and cut the plough deep into the earth that has been at rest, grub more gorse, and wonder when he has time how in the name of the kingdom of cows he can give them more milk and cheese and butter and the rest. All the time he grows older and his cows and pastures with him and his wife too, and thinner, and his family out of school at 12 or 13 or less and all toiling too in the byre or behind the plough on the rattling stinking tractor, among the dust behind the bumping harrows or the runaway spiralling of the tricky discs, or in the garden, or up along the live hedges where the new growth twists prickly out to blitzkrieg over the valuable soil.

In The Towns

In the towns it is not milk at all, that is the worst of it. It is not cream or cheese or butter; it is overseas exchange in figures in books, and bottles that arrive miraculously every morning before the newspaper, and butter that's not-too-yellow and oblong and wrapped up tight in paper that tears and lets your finger into the greasy soft stuff beneath.



HAM ON THE HOOF: A moving study of war effort on the New Zealand farming front, where there is a sucker born every minute—and sometimes more than one

But on the farm it is work, work, work, and still work; and little time at night for politics and not much more for sleep. Up at three or four or earlier if there is morning delivery to be caught, and then a cup of tea (for the wife has been about and kindled the stove) and then out to the byres to put sweet hay for the snuffing cows to scent before them while they give their milk, and the boy is out and the dog getting in the cows over the wet long tips of grass and clover and feeling the places they have lain to get the warmth of the sheltered earth into his early-morning cold hands.

Then the milk comes, squirting in the pails and by now daughter is up looking after the breakfast, cutting the school lunches, while the wife comes out to the dairy and starts the fresh lathery gallons pouring over the cooler, washes the pails as they come in, directs one lot of skim to the calves and some to the cats and some for the puppies under the house, and sees that the separator hums at the right note and watches the signal wire to see that the water tank is well supplied.

Breakfast At Last

Cows out and hoses in and hard brushes, and the drains flowing out full with the muck of the byre and the barrow rumbling and screeching with its load of manure for the steaming heap where the sun has trickled thinly round the corner of the high stable building through the gentle cold hazes of the winter morning.

Breakfast soon, but first the cans must be lifted to the runabout truck, and 10 gallons of milk is heavy with no breakfast yet and the train to catch quickly—there is the whistle down the line!

At the station the train waits uninterestedly for a few minutes before it

rolls on to the city where the housewives not yet out of bed will be waiting soon for their milk and their morning paper: and then back again to the farm, and breakfast at last. The hired man is up now, out of the sheets the wife launders for him and with his sox darned by her of nights and his belly full of her good porridge and eggs and bacon and fruit still left from the autumn picklings in the unpruned orchard.

The Day's Work

Then the long day, with the fences to be tightened and the gaps to be mended and the hedges to be trimmed and that blasted binder to be fixed . . . wood for the wife's washing and hot water for the sore on the foreleg of the old draught mare . . . the bridge to be mended and the hard lugging of the beams into place and the splitting drive of the long spikes . . . it is time we started again on that well before it falls in, but the bull has jumped the rails again . . .

And all the time there is next spring to wonder about and whether it was wise to sow in the damp autumn and whether in spring it might not be playing safe to sow again if we can decide whether it is time the turnip paddock had another crop in it . . . whether to ring the agent and buy that stuff now or wait and hope that the price will come down . . . whether to sell the unborn lambs forward or wait and see how the market goes . . . whether to force the farm to carry more cows and risk the possibility of a bad season . . . whether to make it easier for the cows by dropping some of the sheep, and whether to conserve the land for the future or drain the last out of it while the war is on.

(Continued on next page)



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