

# TOPPING THE MARKET

(By A. R. Bohoskey, formerly hog buyer for Union Meat Company, North Portland, Oregon.)

I have been requested to give a talk on hogs and have selected for the subject of this talk "Topping the Market." It is, or should be, the ambition of all hog raisers to top the market with their hogs and after the successful hog raiser has topped the market he should not be content with this, but should make an effort to "Spring the Market," to use a stock yards phrase. It should be a source of keen gratification to a hog raiser to take his hogs to market and on his return home be able to tell his neighbors that he not only topped the market, but raised the market to a new level.

### Purebreds vs. Cross Breeds

The first step to take in this direction should be to raise pure-bred hogs. This is of vital importance to the ultimate success of any hog raiser. Volumes have been written as to the advisability of raising pure-bred hogs, and you, no doubt, have been urged to raise pure-breds times without number. You cannot, however, have this brought to your attention too forcibly. I have often heard the statement made that the first cross is an improvement on pure-bred hogs for market purposes, but I have never been convinced that there is any advantage whatever to be derived from crossing two breeds of hogs. Granting, however, that the first cross makes an excellent hog, there are times when it is necessary to save the gilts for breeding purposes, and if these are bred their progeny will embrace all the undesirable features of both breeds and bear little resemblance to their pure-bred ancestors.

### Buyers Prefer Purebreds

It always pays to remember that an even load of pure-bred hogs of uniform size, carrying finish and quality, makes an attractive display and appeals very strongly to the buyer. He will make a special effort to buy hogs of this kind even if it is necessary to spring the market to do so. He can estimate within one or two per cent of what these hogs will yield and can figure the dressed cost very closely. On the other hand, a load of hogs of assorted sizes and breeds are hard to judge and he is forced to make liberal allowances when buying this class of hogs, and generally a load of this kind does not bring what it is worth as it is heavily discounted by the buyer.

I certainly would not advocate selling your sows at a sacrifice and investing in pure breeds at a high cost. This would be courting financial disaster if done too hastily. It is better to breed up, using pure-bred boars, the best that can be obtained and as you fatten up your cross-bred sows for market and dispose of them, replace them with pure-breds of the same breed as your boar, wherever possible.

### Most Desirable Breed

I have been asked a great many times, "What breed of hogs is most in demand by the packers?" The packers must have an assortment of types. They would be placed at a great disadvantage if they were forced to buy all Poland Chinas, Duroc Jerseys or Chester Whites. They must have some of the bacon types as well, such as the Tamworth, the Hampshire, the Yorkshire, and the Berkshire. Any of these breeds or any of the other standard breeds, are what the packer wants.

Fortunately hog raisers disagree as to the most profitable breed to raise. The producer should decide as to the breed best suited to his taste; he should then invest in pure-bloods of this type and stay with the breed, not allowing any foreign blood to work into his herd.

### The Best Weight Hog

I have also been asked, "What weight hog is required by the packer and what weight hog will top the market?" The range of weights within which a load of hogs will top the market is wide indeed. Hogs weighing from 150 to 250 pounds will top the market providing, of course, that they possess quality and finish. The packer must have assorted sizes as well as assorted types. It does not necessarily follow that the producer endeavor to embrace these various weights in a car of hogs; he should endeavor to turn off his hogs as uniform in size and weight as possible. They look better and sell better. The hog raiser should also decide for himself as to what weight hog he should put on the market.

It would be fallacious for me to suggest to any producer that he market his hogs at 175, 200 or 225 pounds without knowing the conditions he works under. One producer may have an abundance of cheap

grain. It is advisable for this man to feed grain while his pigs are on pasture; feed them a daily ration in conjunction with the pasturage, keeping his pigs fat and thrifty and making daily gains. It is a well-known fact that hogs will put on the most profitable gains during the first few months of their life, and with the grain at his disposal the producer can market his pigs at an early age, before they get into the strong-weight class.

Another producer may have plenty of pasture and be compelled to buy his grain. It would no doubt be policy for him to allow his pigs to run on pasture until they attain growth and frame before putting them up to feed. If properly finished, this man's hogs would go into the strong-weight class, ranging from 225 to 250 pounds.

### Do Not Economize on Feed

It never pays to economize on grain at the expense of finish. The buyer is always looking for hogs with a hard-grain finish. He knows they will dress out firm and make a high per cent and can afford to pay more for hogs of this kind than those which run on pasture all summer without grain and are then put on stubble for a short time, fed little, if any, grain in addition, and rushed to market prematurely. He will pass this class of hogs up and will only buy them when he cannot get enough good hogs to fill his requirements.

To illustrate the comparative value of the two grades of hogs just mentioned: A buyer will buy a load of well-bred, highly-finished, grain-fed hogs at, say, 8c per pound. He will also buy a load of cross-breeds off pasture and which have just been "warmed up" on grain at \$7.50. The good load at 8c will yield 80 per cent and cost 10c per pound dressed, while the other load will yield 75 per cent and cost exactly the same price on the hook. Which is the cheaper load? The good load, of course. The buyer of today figures on a dressed cost when buying his hogs and the live cost serves only as a basis on which to figure the yield. This illustration shows that the live price does not always indicate whether a car of hogs is cheap or high. The quality and ability to dress a high per cent is what counts.

The hard, grain-fed hog will yield a product which is firm and has quality, while the half-fat hog, which has run on pasture and fed very little grain, will dress out soft and sloppy, and its product will grade very low indeed. The packer dislikes having this product in his cellars at any price, as it hurts his trade.

If you finish your hogs and they have the quality, the buyer will always be on the lookout when they are due on the market, and he will make a strong effort to buy them, as he knows what they will do. The buyer is kept posted of the yields of the different hogs he buys and he knows where to look for the good hogs.

### Stay With Hog Raising

Do not be an "in-and-outer." Stay with the hog game. It does not pay to get into the game when hogs are high and out of it when they seem low. The man who stays with it year in and year out is bound to make handsome profits. At no time in the past few years has it been unprofitable to raise hogs. We have had only temporary depressions and the subsequent rise in the market has brought the average price of hogs up to a very profitable level for the producer.

Let us suppose that the Union Meat Co., who kill thousands of hogs each week, should pursue a policy of not buying hogs when they were high and waiting for a low market on which to put up their hogs. You can readily appreciate that they could not stay in the packing business very long.

I have bought a great many hogs on a high market when I knew these hogs would lose the company money, but we all know that the market would decline sooner or later and strike a reasonable average. The successful hog raiser must also work on this basis. There never has been a time when the hog market has stayed on an exceedingly low level for any great length of time. Because the producer appears to lose money on a load of hogs is not sufficient reason for him to quit the hog business.

### Do Not Speculate on the Market

Never speculate on the market. When your hogs are finished and are at a point where they refuse to put on profitable gains, it is always best to sell them, as the market is apt to decline as it is to advance. I have offered \$9.25 for hogs which

the owner was holding for a \$9.50 market and later bought the same hogs at 8c. The owner lost \$1.25 per cwt. and his hogs were not paying for their feed, as they were finished.

### Value of a Competitive Market

I would also suggest that in disposing of your hogs you ship your own hogs to an open market. The most logical market for this locality is the Portland Union Stock Yards. By consigning your hogs to one of the commission firms at the stock yards you will be assured of maximum results. There is double competition there. The commission men compete with each other to secure your business and will make a special effort to secure the extreme price for your hogs, as they know if they do not they will lose your

business. Then, too, there are buyers there representing all the large slaughterers and most of the small killers in the Northwest. Competition is what you want, and it is here that you get it. This is the only open competitive market on the Pacific Coast, and is entitled to your patronage. You must remember that the buyer who tries to buy your hogs at your ranch bases his price on the Portland market. You have the Portland quotations and he is compelled to use the Portland market as a basis on which to buy your hogs. You must also consider the fact that he would not be at your ranch unless he expects to buy them cheaper than he could at Portland, providing he represents a packer. If a country shipper, he must make a profit on the transac-

tion and you are entitled to this profit. The country shipper is very essential in localities where the hogs are widely scattered and each rancher has only a few head. He collects them in car lots and ships them to market. But the rancher who has a carload or can consolidate with some of his neighbors and make up a carload, should consign them to the open market.

### Community Shipments Popular

I have purchased loads of hogs in the Portland yards made up of hogs owned by from 15 to 20 different ranchers. They are sorted up in the yards, sold on their merits and the expense pro-rated. Each owner gets all there is in his hogs in this manner. These community shipments are becoming very popular. It certainly looks like poor judgment to raise and fatten your

hogs and then divide the profits with another.

Some producers carry the idea that the country shipper can get more for hogs on the market than he can. This is not the case by any means. The hogs are consigned to a commission firm. Their salesman sells the hogs at \$10 per car commission. He will probably have from five to fifteen cars of hogs to show the buyer. The buyer does not look at the shipper, but the hogs, and it is immaterial to him who shipped them in. What he wants is quality in the hogs. It is not necessary to know the ropes. Merely ship your hogs to one of the commission men at the yards. He will feed your hogs, water them, sell them, see that they are weighed properly, and give you a check to cover the same day the hogs are

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