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Home Course In Modern Agriculture

XV.—Breeding Live Stock

By C. V. GREGORY,
Agricultural Division, Iowa State College

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THE science of breeding is very complicated, but there are some points that should be understood and followed by every farmer. No matter how well stock may be fed and cared for, if they do not have the inherited capacity to transform their feed economically into milk or beef or power they will at ways be "scrubs." On the other hand, poor feeding and care may make a scrub out of an animal which has the inherited ability to develop into something much better. To attain the best results breeding, feeding and intelligent care must go hand in hand.

Pure bred stock not only have the ability to make much more profitable use of the food given them, but they also add greatly to the appearance of the place. A pasture dotted with well bred, uniform calves, colts or sheep marks the owner as a progressive farmer. There is a great deal more pleasure, too, in caring for good stock than there is in vainly trying to get unprofitable animals into market condition.

The first thing to consider in starting in with pure bred stock is what

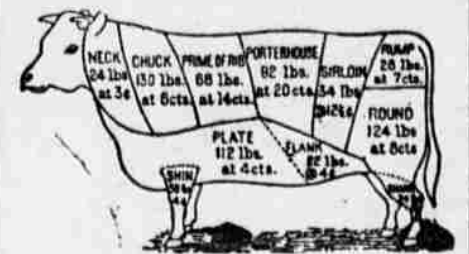


FIG. XXIX—THE WAY A FAT SHEEP ANIMAL IS CUT UP.
(Note the high prices of the back and loin.)

breed to select. Do not make a hasty choice, for nothing will ruin your chances of success more certainly than frequent changes from one breed to another. Select your breed with care and then stick to it. All the leading breeds have good points, and the matter of selection is more a question of individual preference than anything else.

In beginning with pure bred stock the best plan for the average farmer to follow is to purchase a pure bred male of the desired breed and proceed to grade up his herd. There are two principles of breeding that should be kept in mind in this work. The first is the old law that "like produces like." In the main this law holds good, and, other things being equal, the offspring will resemble the parents. The second is the law of "atavism," or the tendency of the offspring to take after some remote ancestor. This is where the value of the pure bred sire comes in. His ancestors for generations have been animals of the same type as himself, and hence there is little chance of his progeny differing from this type to any serious extent. This long continued breeding along a certain line gives to the pure bred animal an ability to reproduce his type that the grade sire lacks. This ability is called prepotency.

Because of his great prepotency a pure bred bull when mated to grade cows has much more influence over the characters of his offspring than the mothers have. This is most strikingly shown when a polled bull is mated to horned cows. Nine out of every ten of the calves will usually be polled. It is the same with other characteristics—the ability to quickly turn corn into high priced beef or to use the feed for profitable milk and butter production.

Of course if the cows are pure bred also there is less chance of the calves resembling some inferior ancestor on their mother's side, and improvement will be more rapid and certain. The cost of an entire herd of pure bred is very great, however, and profits will come more surely by the grading up plan. After this has been carried on for a time, so that the farmer has some experience in breeding and caring for high class stock, a gradual start in pure bred females may be made by buying a cow and calf or a few yearling heifers. As the offspring of these increase the number of pure bred in the herd the grades can gradually be disposed of until an entire pure bred herd finally results.

In the selection of a sire to begin grading up a herd it is important that he be of the type which it is desired to reproduce in the offspring. The most important things to look for in a beef bull are constitution, form, quality and thick fleshing. Of these constitution is probably the most important, as a bull that is strong in this point will have the ability to sire a large number of rugged, healthy calves. Constitution is indicated by a deep, wide chest; large "barrel," giving plenty of room for the digestive organs; good sized nostrils and a large, clear eye. A point that must go with constitution if the best results are to be obtained is prepotency. Prepotency means the ability of a sire to reproduce his good points in his offspring. It is indicated by a heavy crest and a masculine looking head. A bull that has a fine, feminine appearing head will not be at all certain of producing good calves, even though he is a good individual himself.

Constitution and prepotency are of

little account, however, unless the bull has the proper form. The back and hind quarters of a beef animal are the parts that produce the high priced meat. Great width all along the back, especially over the loin; good spring of rib, plenty of depth and short legs are points that should be looked for. Long legged bulls are usually narrow and rangy. The legs are of little value as meat, so the shorter they are the better.

Quality is shown by fineness of hair, pliability of hide and not too much coarseness of shoulder, head and bone. An animal with good quality will furnish a better grade of meat, and there will be less waste in killing.

Thickness of flesh is one of the most important points to look for. By this is meant not fat, but the natural covering of lean meat. Fat can be put on during the feeding period, but lean meat cannot. An animal that is thickly muscled at the beginning of the feeding period will furnish a carcass that will be well marbled with streaks of fat and lean, while another on the same feed will put most of his fat on in the form of tallow.

These same points are the essential ones to look for in the selection of a ram or boar. Strong constitution, wide, deep, blocky form, fine quality and thick fleshing are just as important in these animals as in the bull.

Of course it will be impossible to find an animal that is perfect in all points. If the females in your herd are badly lacking in any particular be sure to select a male that is especially strong there. On the other hand, a slight weakness on the part of the sire in a place where the females are especially strong may be overlooked. An animal that has any very serious faults, however, should not be considered for a moment.

Dairy bulls lack the fleshing and compactness that characterize beef animals. Low setness and extra width of back are not so essential. Constitution, as shown by a deep chest, wide on the bottom and a roomy barrel, is important. A clean head, smooth shoulder, fine limbs and pliable skin show the quality that is so necessary in a dairy animal. The most important point is prepotency. A strong chest, masculine head and large rudimentary testis are all indications of this. The best way to forecast a dairy bull's prepotency, however, is to look up the milk and butter producing records of his dam and granddams. A bull out of a high producing cow will almost certainly beget heifers that will be high yielders.

The most important points to look for in draft horses, which are the most profitable kind to raise on the farm, are power and endurance. Power is indicated by size, compactness and heavy muscling, especially in the hind quarters. Endurance is shown by a strong constitution and fine quality, especially of limbs.

Strict observance of these points in the selection of a sire of any kind will give you an animal that will in a few years bring about a great improvement in your herd. Pedigree should not be neglected entirely in picking out a sire. Its chief value is in showing that the animal is pure bred and that his ancestors were of the type which you wish to develop in your herd. To determine the latter point, however, requires a longer study of herd books than most farmers have time for. If you put the chief stress upon the individuality of the animal and file the pedigree away in a drawer where it can be referred to when necessary you will not go far wrong.

When you have found an animal of the desired type do not hesitate too

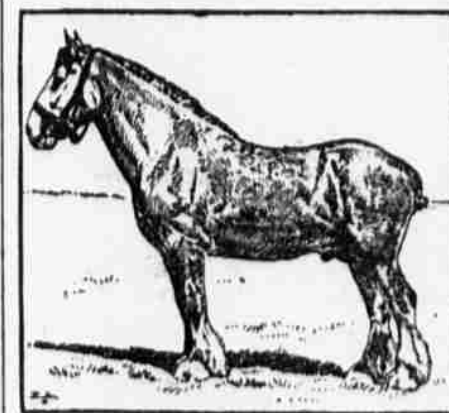


FIG. XXX—A TYPICAL DRAFT HORSE.

long over the price. A hundred and fifty dollars may look like a big price to pay for a bull, but an increase of \$2 a head in the value of the calf crop will pay for him in two or three years. In many cases you may be able to join with two or three of your nearest neighbors in the purchase of a bull, thus not only saving money, but also obtaining a better animal than you would be able to secure otherwise. This applies with still more force to the purchase of a stallion. In many communities it is impossible to secure the services of a first class horse of any breed. In such a case if fifteen or twenty farmers will agree upon a breed and subscribe \$100 each a horse can be procured that will almost pay for himself in the increased value of his first crop of colts.

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