Influence of Modern Market Upon Growth of Nebraska's Live Stock Industry

EASY accessibility to good markets has ever been a potential factor in the settlement of a new territory. Countries rich in natural resources have remained dormant because of the necessity of a market for the commodities which they were able to produce in abundance, or because transportation facilities were lacking which would enable them to get their products to consuming centers with profit. Agricultural localities likewise are retarded in their development because of their inaccessibility to market centers. Probably no branch of agriculture is more keenly sensitive to market disadvantages than the live stock industry. Old-time stockmen have only to harken back to their early experiences to appreciate the transition which has been wrought by the introduction of constantly improving market methods.

New Epoch in Live Stock Industry

The advent of the railroad marked a new epoch in the growth of the live stock industry. Scarcely more than a half century ago the carrying trade of the United States was limited to passenger traffic and what is now known as "dead freight." Relatively few live animals were then carried, and even on boats, which were the chief carriers of bulky merchandise, suitable facilities were not provided for live stock. Prior to 1850 it was the general practice to drive live stock on foot to market. Such markets as there were of any importance were along the Atlantic seaboard, with New York the prominent one. In those days driving to Atlantic seaboard cities from points as far west as Iowa was by no means uncommon. As illustrative of the vicissitudes and hardships experienced in marketing live stock by means of the primitive methods of transportation then available, we quote from the records of the Department of Agriculture the following:

One of the first shipments of cattle by rail from Kentucky to eastern markets, made in 1852, is described by the shipper as follows: One week was consumed in driving the cattle, 100 in number, from the neighborhood of Lexington, Ky., to Cincinnati. Here they were loaded in box cars and shipped by rail to Cleveland, whence they were taken by steamboat to Buffalo. After a stay of several days at Buffalo the animals were driven to Canandaigua, N. Y.; thence they were hauled in immigrant cars to Albany, where they were unloaded in the freight house. After spending two days in a feed yard near Albany the stock was taken by boat to New York. The freight on these cattle from Cincinnati to Buffalo was $120 per car, and the total expense from Kentucky to New York was $14 per head.

Today a car of cattle can be shipped from Utah, Idaho or Montana to South Omaha at less than one-half this cost per animal, consuming less than one-fifth of the time in transit.

J. A. SHOEMAKER
Traffic Manager of the Union Stock Yards, South Omaha

He is No Longer Monarch of the Nebraska Prairies

Many Shippers Real Speculators

In the early days referred to many of the shippers of live stock were speculators—and they were real speculators, too, for they had not the advantages of the telephone and telegraph and daily paper—who bought cattle, hogs and sheep from the growers and feeders in their home localities and went with them to the eastern market cities. In the '60s and early '70s New York, Buffalo, Baltimore and Boston were prominent live stock markets, Buffalo being a sort of primary market where many cattle were handled from Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Kentucky, etc., a large percentage of which were forwarded on to other markets for final disposition. Baltimore was more particularly a hog market, while Boston and New York were literally "jumping-off" places—final markets.

Because of the long time required to reach the market and the absence of reliable market intelligence the shipper was absolutely in the dark as to the probable proceeds from the sale of his stock; likewise the buyers at market points knew very little about what to expect in the way of receipts from one day to another. The local butchers and small packers, together with those men who bought stock for speculative purposes, constituted the buying power of the markets. Facilities for storing or shipping meats and meat food products under refrigeration were not then available and the various processes for curing and preparing meats for food had not been developed to that degree of perfection which marks the success of modern packing methods.

Modern Conveniences Unknown

Artificial refrigeration and the cold storage warehouses which are now so essential to the successful handling of all perishable commodities were unknown, and only those meats could be stored for future use which were susceptible to the comparatively crude processes then in operation, chiefly pork bellies and side meats, the successful curing of hams, shoulders and other cuts of the hog having come about with the evolution of the modern packing plant. Pork packing was confined entirely to the winter season and the marketing of hogs was, therefore, limited to the same period of the year, which forced the farmer to hold his hogs, sometimes for months after they were ready for slaughter, and sell them at a time when other raisers and feeders were obliged to market theirs.

The same lack of facilities restricted the handling of dressed beef and made the market for cattle and sheep equally uncertain, with the result that large receipts of cattle and sheep from the west were often sacrificed at ridiculous prices.

The Old and the New Way

In sharp contrast with the conditions then prevailing, the modern market offers an open demand the year through which knows no limitations and the most liberal receipts of all classes of live stock are quickly absorbed at prices which as a rule show reasonable stability. Under the old methods packers and butchers were forced to turn their products quickly and only buy the quantity of stock for which they had immediate outlet. Therefore, there could be no stability of market conditions and wild fluctuation of prices was the inevitable result of feast and famine supplies of stock and marketing was a veritable gamble. The shipper would leave home with an indefinite idea as to when he would return. If he could not sell his stock at Buffalo he would go to Boston or New York, and it was the rule then, somewhat as now, that he who went farthest fared worst. When he got to the "end of his string," which was New York or Boston, he was often obliged to wait for days, and then more than likely be forced to sacrifice his offerings to some bargain-driving trader.

All Sales Are for Cash

Then the shipper had to personally look after his stock from the time it left home until the animals were disposed of at the market, attend to the unloading and feeding of them, negotiate the sale, help in the weighing and make delivery to the purchaser. Now this is all done under the careful supervision of the commission firm to whom the shipper entrusts the sale of his stock. Under modern stock yards methods and the rules

T. ("Dorey") E. Sanders, Who Bought the First Cattle at the South Omaha Market