

Lou Moore says, "Livestock prospects to improve"

UNIVERSITY PARK — The livestock economy has for more than a year been besieged with low cattle and hog prices, high interest rates, weak consumer demand, and (since last fall) higher feed prices. Improvement should come soon and substantial price rises for both cattle and hogs are expected, according to H. Louis Moore, Livestock Marketing Specialist.

The recent pig crop report indicated hog farmers have finally gotten the message they were producing too many hogs. The cut in numbers is greater than earlier expected.

In December, producers said they planned to cut the December 1980 - February 1981 pig crop by 6 percent. This was a modest cut and was based on the prospect that the hog market would improve as the new year began.

When prices actually drifted lower in the new year, producers lost all enthusiasm for the future. Actually farrowings during the period dropped by 10 percent.

The number of market hogs on farms at the beginning of March was down 8 percent and the breeding herd is down 11 percent. Hog production will drop progressively as the year continues.

Price improvement should begin soon and rise to at least the mid-\$50 range by summer and should remain at \$50 or above for the remainder of the year. While this price improvement will be welcome news to hog producers, profits will be elusive.

High feed costs and other costs associated with the hog business

brings the break-even price to about \$53 for efficient producers. It appears that the planned cut in production will bring producers up to the break even level by mid-year, but the profits will not be sufficient to encourage a return to overproduction.

Most of the reduction in hog numbers is being made by small operators. The larger producers are increasing their share of the market and do not (because of the high investment in specialized facilities) have the option of cutting production during periods of price adversity.

In 14 states last year, operators with 500 or more hogs per farm were only 6 percent of the total number of hog farmers, but they handled 44 percent of the total hog numbers.

As hog production begins to drop, competition from beef will ease too. Beef supplies were up sharply, in the January-March period, mostly as a result of heavier weights fed in cattle and an increase in slaughter of non-fed animals.

Now that many of the over-finished cattle have moved to market, beef production should at last begin to drop. Combined with a decline in hog slaughter and an increase in consumer taste for beef as warmer weather arrives, the stage is set for cattle prices to move above the \$70 level by early summer.

Price improvement and the greening of pastures will result in increases in feeder-cattle prices this spring.

As in hogs, price increases will

be somewhat illusionary. For most cattle feeders, the break-even price is well over \$70. But to sell cattle at near the break-even price is progress in these volatile times.

All prospects for livestock are based on the assumption that feed prices remain at near current levels for the months ahead.

If livestock producers are to profit in 1981, they must get help from the weather. A bumper corn crop is needed to keep feed prices from moving sharply higher next fall.

The reserve is depleted and a crop of less than 7.7 billion bushels will force prices higher, reducing feeding margins for livestock producers. The U.S. has produced a 7.7-billion-bushel crop only once — in 1979, when production totaled 7.9 billion bushels.

So far in 1981 the weather has not cooperated. Most of the nation reports very dry conditions for this time of the year. Subsoil moisture is a problem for most states, and the crucial spring planting season is here.

The extent of the problem is perhaps best illustrated by reports of barge traffic on the Mississippi River. Barges are having trouble finding depths adequate for moving — at a time of the year when we would normally be hearing about floods on many major rivers.

Heavy and regular rains will be needed throughout the growing season. The 1981 grain market will be very sensitive to weather news as the growing season begins.

Dwarf trees on trellises can double apple yields

UNIVERSITY PARK — Walls of fruit on dwarf apple trees, grown on trellises, can double the yield of standard trees of similar age, according to results of several years of experiments at Penn State.

"Such apple trees grown this way can produce average yields of 1000 bushels per acre when 8 to 12 years old," declared Loren D. Tukey, scientist in fruit culture with the College of Agriculture.

"This yield is twice that of standard trees of similar age," he said.

Tukey called the tree form a low-trellis hedgerow. The hedgerow increases the volume of tree devoted to bearing fruit while using fewer limbs for support, he

explained.

Tukey has experimented for 20 years with several orchards using dwarf apple trees grown on M.9 and M.26 rootstocks. Such rootstocks help to increase maximum plant density for fruiting areas.

Dwarf trees grown on trellises also produce large crops sooner than standard trees. Such apple tree systems are called intensive plantings.

"In intensive plantings, the major cost factor in establishment is the greater number of trees being used rather than the cost of the support system required," Tukey affirmed.

Since the trellis-trained dwarf trees are only 6 to 8 feet tall, smaller sized equipment can be used than for standard trees. Energy per unit of production is lower than on standard trees, Tukey noted, since yields are earlier and higher.

The low-trellis hedgerow consists of a series of posts and four wires, each 18 inches apart, with the top wire at 6 feet. The trees are trained on these wires.

The most common tree training system is one Tukey calls the "oblique palmette." This tree form inclines limbs at a 30 to 45 degree angle from the horizontal and extends branches into adjacent trees — a wall for bearing fruit.

The low-trellis hedgerow requires a major management change from handling individual trees. First, the outer fruiting mantle or fruitbearing area is developed. After this, training and pruning is almost totally devoted to caring for the fruit mantle and

regulating growth of trees.

Another tree form, the slender spindle, resembles a small Christmas tree in shape. A pole at each tree supports the central trunk. Unlike the oblique palmette, a row consists of a group of individual trees.

"Yields of intensively grown apple trees should reach 900 to 1200 bushels per acre annually," Tukey stated. "In our research orchard at Rock Springs in Centre County, apples have generally measured 2 3/4 inches in diameter or larger for 65 percent of the crop. Fruit size has been an important factor in achieving high yields."

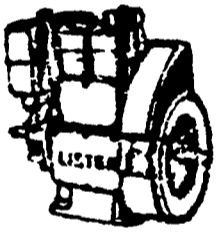
A report on the Penn State research with dwarf apple trees on low-trellis hedgerows will be published in the Spring issue of "Science in Agriculture," the quarterly magazine of the Agricultural Experiment Station at Penn State. To be included on the mailing list for all issues, write to 229 Agricultural Administration Building, University Park, PA. 16802.

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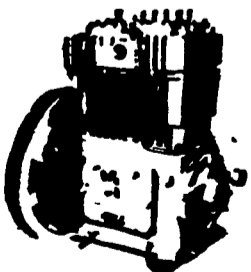
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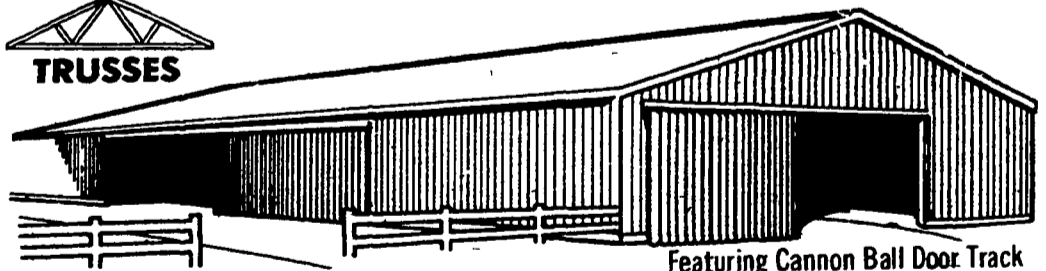


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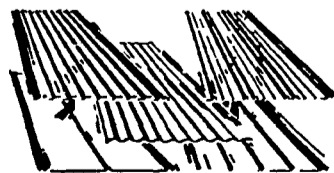
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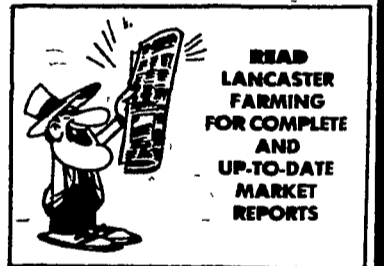
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