

Production and Marketing

Hog production became important in Iowa immediately after the settlement of the state in 1833. The staple grain crop in Iowa from the beginning was corn, and it soon was produced far in excess of use as a foodstuff. Thus, from the start, the hog became the logical outlet for converting this surplus economically into meat and lard for export. The Census of 1840 showed there were 104,899 hogs in Iowa.

Most of the early settlers brought hogs with them as they crossed the Mississippi. This hog was a tough animal, long of leg and very muscular, built more for speed than for the economical production of hams and savory bacon. He was turned loose to roam in the woods and on the unfenced prairie, and, as in colonial times, the owners "cropped the pigs" or "slit" the ears so that they could be identified. Most pigs were farrowed in the spring months and allowed to shift for themselves during the summer and early winter, when they were penned and fed some corn. They were turned out again the second summer and allowed to grow slowly. The second fall they were penned again and fed corn enough to fatten them for market. Such hogs were large, very active, and nearly

two years old when marketed. The term "razor-back" developed because some of them were, figuratively speaking, as thin as a razor blade.

Pork constituted the main meat supply for the farmer and his family during the winter, and the fat was rendered for lard. If more hogs were raised than the family needed, the surplus in early days was driven to market, a practice followed in marketing hogs in the East.

Some of the drives were made by the owners themselves, but more often by drovers who speculated in hogs. These drives apparently were very spectacular. Men and boys on foot and horseback equipped with sticks and whips would drive large droves running into the hundreds to a market which it took days to reach. Five to ten miles a day was considered a good day's travel. The hog, not adapted to fast walking, is an obstinate creature, difficult to drive. In some instances their eyelids were stitched together so they could not see where they were being driven. Ox teams would accompany the drives, loaded with food for the drivers and corn for the hogs. The overseer of the drive went ahead and arranged for the overnight stopping places. In 1865 a drive was made from Monona County to Yankton, South Dakota, a distance of 100 miles. Other drives were made from eastern Iowa to Chicago and from Delaware County to Ft. Atkinson, Iowa. Stories relate that great difficulty was encountered in getting the

hogs to cross bridges. Often they had to be ferried across, or they swam streams and in some cases crossed on ice. Occasionally the ice would break, plunging the hogs into the stream, and casualties frequently resulted from ice cutting the throats of the swimming hogs. Drivers of hogs in stockyards today usually yell "sui" or "su-boy" to urge the hogs along; this was the term used by the drivers years ago to speed the laggards on their long treks to market.

The steadily growing hog business in Iowa soon began to offer great possibilities for the establishment of the pork packing business within the state. It was quickly recognized that it was less costly to process the live hog near where he was produced, and to ship the dressed pork to the consuming centers of the east, than to drive or ship the live hog long distances with a certain amount of shrinkage as well as possible loss by death.

Local pork packing early became a thriving business in Iowa, especially in the Mississippi River towns. As early as 1841 there were three packing plants in Burlington, and by 1859 interior Bloomfield had "several." By that date, also, a pork packing plant had opened in Council Bluffs on the Missouri River; a year later Ottumwa began her long career as a "packing house" town when George Gillaspie opened a pork packing house there. By 1859 Muscatine and Keokuk had developed the packing business and were packing

about one-fourth as many hogs as Cincinnati which up to that time had been the pork-packing capital of the United States. The early packing centers developed mainly along the rivers because of the availability of water transportation. During the 50's Dubuque, Davenport, and Ft. Madison also packed pork. Later on Sabula and Clinton joined the other cities. Of these, Dubuque, Davenport, and Muscatine are still in the business today.

The opportunity for the development of pork processing at Sioux City was early recognized. The first killing of hogs there was started by accident, when a cargo of wheat became stranded. James E. Booge bought the wheat and fed it to hogs, but when they were finished he was unable to find a market for them. The only alternative was to slaughter the animals and find a way to peddle the meat. In 1860 he built a small plant which marked the dawn of the meat-packing industry in Sioux City.

During and immediately following the Civil War hog production expanded rapidly, as the extension of the railroads brought better transportation to Iowa. In fact, in the decade following the Civil War, there were not many towns in Iowa more than fifteen miles from a railroad station. This development of transportation soon had its effect upon the marketing problems which confronted the producers with their surpluses. The

greatest number of Iowa hogs went to Chicago. The development of Illinois, Iowa, and adjacent territories stimulated increased pork production, thus making Chicago the leading center for the packing of pork, a position maintained until the 1900's. By that time, the development of the so-called interior plants in Iowa and Minnesota began to have its influence upon Chicago. In 1900, for example, Chicago had runs of 100,000 daily; in 1950 a run of 15,000 to 20,000 was considered heavy. Now interior plants often have runs collectively of 90,000 to 100,000 in a single day.

During the period when Chicago and other centers were the main packing plants, hogs were bought at local shipping points by buyers, either operating on their own, or buying for some packing concern. Such a procedure in marketing continued until the late 90's and early 1900's. About this time the cooperative shipping and marketing association came into the field with a membership of farmers who agreed to deliver their hogs to a central point where a paid manager of the association loaded the hogs and shipped them to some market. Later, grading and sorting was practiced, and more was done in the selection of a market which would pay the best prices.

The first of these associations was organized at Postville in 1904. Growth outside of northeast Iowa was very slow until 1919 when popular enthusiasm became general. By 1925 a total of 697

associations handled about one-fourth of all the livestock sold in Iowa, the most of which was hogs. Their success depended upon good management, volume of business, cutting the cost of handling, and return of greater margins to the producer.

For several years these associations operated quite successfully, but it soon became apparent that they were too numerous. The lack of adequate objectives, dependable membership, and the failure to adjust to the changing economic needs of the farmers were all factors contributing to a decline in numbers in the late 20's and early 30's. The development of the trucking system, the advent of hard roads, and the expansion of the interior packing plants further hastened this decline. In 1937 only 173 remained; in 1952 some 60 associations are still in existence.

The growing tide of immigration into Iowa after the Civil War had brought more settled farming practices. Farms were fenced, and the hog no longer roamed at will on the open prairie. Improved breeding of the stock was a result. Whenever a few farmers gathered together, discussion centered on the use of improved breeding stock, better feeding, and the control of diseases and parasites. The farm press published articles on swine, and agricultural societies discussed production. Even during this period the demand grew for smaller, leaner, fresh cuts of pork, and farmers

were thinking about the type and weight of hog they should produce.

In 1865 there were over one million hogs in Iowa; by 1870 this number had doubled, marking the beginning of intensive hog production. The number in 1880 was 4.5 million and grew to 6 million in 1890. The numbers of hogs since then have varied yearly, depending upon the supply of corn. In 1931 Iowa produced approximately 16 million head, but dropped to less than 10 million in 1935 due to the drought of 1934. Iowa has produced more than twenty million head in two different years, 1943 and 1951.

This growth in the number of hogs inevitably led to a great expansion of pork packing. Many of the small plants organized in Iowa as early as the 1860's have since failed, gone out of business, or been taken over by the large national packers. One of the early establishments is the John Morrell Company of Ottumwa, which began in England in 1827, and had operated a plant in Chicago from 1871 to 1888. In 1877 they leased the old B. Ladd Company plant in Ottumwa. Today the slaughter at Morrells exceeds a million a year, with a killing capacity of 640 hogs per hour, in contrast to the operations of the B. Ladd Company which killed 22,000 head in 1860-1861.

The packing business in Sioux City went through a hectic period from 1860 to the coming of Cudahy & Company on November 28, 1892.

The names of Booge, Haakinson, Silberhorn, and the Union Stock Yards figure prominently in the packing house history during this period. In June, 1901, Cudahy was followed by Armour & Company. During the boom years of 1918 a cooperative company known as the Midland Packing Company was organized and a modern plant constructed, but this enterprise proved a failure. In 1924 Swift & Company bought the plant, thereby expanding a smaller plant which they had operated at Sioux City for a year. Thus, Sioux City had three of the major packing interests, and soon developed into one of the leading livestock markets of the country.

At Waterloo Rath & Company began operations in 1891. Their kill has reached 15,000 hogs a day during the busy season. The hourly kill is 640 hogs. Wilson & Company at Cedar Rapids started the hog buying and packing business in 1930, having purchased the plant from Sinclair & Company which had been in the business there since 1876. The hourly kill is 600 head. In 1934 Tobin & Company started operations at Fort Dodge; they have a maximum kill of 3,500 head daily. Storm Lake is the home of Kingan & Company, started in 1935. They have a daily kill of 2,100 head. Arnold Brothers have a plant at Perry. This plant, started in 1919, was acquired by the Arnolds in 1934. Their kill is 600 to 1,000 head daily.

In Des Moines a meat-packing company had been set up in 1870 under the name of Murphy & Company and the Stowers Pork Packing Company. Between that date and 1917 the plant changed hands several times. The Iowa Packing Company, a branch of Swift, started operations in Des Moines in 1917. Their kill is 400 to 450 hogs hourly. Swift also has a branch plant at Marshalltown. The Decker Division of Armour & Company, located at Mason City, started in 1899. Armour acquired all the stock in 1935. Their kill is a maximum of 5,200 head daily. The Dubuque Packing Company is at Dubuque. In 1946 Oscar Mayer & Company took over the Kohr Packing Plant at Davenport. They kill 300 hogs hourly. There are also several small plants in Iowa, some of which are devoted to the production of sausages, bologna, and specialty hams.

Today the fourteen packing plants in twelve Iowa cities do a tremendous business. Thus the Iowa hog — the famous “mortgage lifter” — has brought money not only to the farmer, but to the industrialist and the laborer as well.

ELVIN LEE QUAIFE
ARTHUR L. ANDERSON