

Hogs to Feed

“Take down the bars, boys, and stand back.”

The gate was down. A long legged, sharp nosed, thin backed creature detached himself from his mates and went sniffing toward the opening. The long bristles stood up on his back. He was wary, he was truculent, but he was hopeful. In that pen surrounded by a fence ten rails high (for a razorback could jump like a greyhound) twenty hogs had been kept for six months. Most of them were two years old; they had been fed corn steadily since they had been shut up; the heaviest weighed less than two hundred pounds.

Back from the pen, on the side away from the road, six boys on horseback waited. Eight men and older boys were on foot, armed with heavy clubs.

The leading razorback stepped gingerly over the bottom rail, sniffed the air, gave a sidelong glance at the men and at the open road ahead. “Whoof”. It was a snort that made the horses jump. The razorback was off down the road, and after him the snorting herd.

“It looked to me like they were going twenty feet at a jump”, an old timer says. “The fellows on foot couldn’t begin to keep up. The boys raced their horses for half a mile after them and then the hogs scattered into the timber.”

Nobody was very much alarmed. After all, the hogs had started in the right direction. Nobody expected to do much driving the first day.

"They'll find each other in a couple of hours," said the owner comfortably. "Then we'll herd 'em back on the road again."

Sure enough, in two hours a scout on a pony found the herd. The drivers came up. The hogs, a little tired by this time, were edged back to the road. Two miles farther along, however, the herd began to gallop again and finally to scatter. The men waited; the herd reassembled; it was herded back on the road; by late afternoon, the hogs were driving well. By evening, they were worn out enough to be driven into a corral. The extra herders had gone back; the men who were making the drive went into the farmhouse for supper. They slept that night on straw on the barn floor. Next morning the drive would go on.

This was the way they marketed hogs in Iowa before the Civil War, in sections where the hog had to furnish its own transportation to market.

We do it differently to-day. Breeds are different; feeding methods are different; so are marketing methods. One thing remains the same in 1850 and in 1930. The hog was then, as he is now, the major source of income for Iowa farmers. Listen to J. H. Wallace, secretary of the State Agricultural Society, at the January meeting in 1860. After noting that the pork sold from Iowa would amount to

\$1,800,000 in the previous year, he added: "The hog crop of Iowa the past two years has been the salvation of the state. Without it, many farmers could not have paid their taxes. It has saved the state from bankruptcy."

In 1929, the Iowa farmer had a gross return of \$262,938,000 from hogs. This was 36.4 per cent of the gross agricultural income for the State. The hog is still important, but we raise a few more.

Where did the first Iowa hogs come from? Early settlers found lean sows rooting for acorns in the timber of southeastern Iowa. De Soto brought hogs with him in 1540; some escaped as far north as Arkansas and probably worked up into Missouri. There may have been Spanish blood in the early Iowa razorback. More likely is the guess that hogs moved westward faster than the pioneers. Settlers brought hogs with them as they worked into the back country east of the Alleghenies; some hogs escaped to the timber; the hardiest survived and went rooting westward. This process was repeated as the frontier moved west, so that the wild hogs were being replenished by hogs only less wild that had tired of the pen.

How did they escape wild animals? Apparently most wild animals were glad to stay out of their way. In the fifties, a sow got out of her pen on a Webster County farm and started down the river. An incautious she wolf and three cubs attacked her. The farmer who was trailing her found the bodies

of the wolves; the sow herself, unhurt, was picked up a mile or two farther on.

A Van Buren County farmer, who has listened to stories from his father and uncle who came into Iowa in the forties and fifties says: "Father tells of being sent to the timber to feed the mother sow. Tales of her prowess in defending her young and the manner of her appearing from the nest, caused him to throw the corn and make a dash for home. . . . These hogs were rather tall, with extremely heavy ears, of no particular breed but resembling in color the Spotted Poland of to-day. These hogs sported plenty of bristles which were wont to stand erect when anything went wrong; a disposition to wander far in search of food; and a disposition unpleasant, to say the least."

Before the railroad, the main markets for hogs were at river towns, though some drove clear to Chicago. One Clinton County pioneer says: "We tried to get these pigs to 125 or 150 pounds and then join with the neighbors in November and start for Chicago. I think it took over a week to get there. And to-day you wouldn't call them hogs. They had plenty of legs, but no hams."

At the river a number of small packing plants sprang up, and some not so small. Alexandria in Missouri got the hog business of southeastern Iowa, though its real boom days came after the Civil War. Pork was salted down in barrels for the southern trade. It was a big item in steamboat freight.

Not all hogs were driven in and killed. At many points, farmers killed at home in winter, dressed the hogs, racked the frozen carcasses up like cordwood on sleds, and drove into town to the packing plant.

The day of the wild hog passed quickly. Along the river, he began to be displaced as the steamboat trade offered a handy market for pork. Back from the river, better and heavier hogs were brought in as the railroad crept West. By the time of the Civil War, railroads had reached Cedar Rapids, Iowa City, Washington, and Ottumwa. As "Uncle Henry" Wallace said, "the railroad had shortened the nose, shortened the legs, done away with the bristles, put a more lovely kink in the tail and changed the color from mixed white and black to black, white or red."

It was not until the sixties, however, that breeds we recognize now began to show up clearly. Before that there were white hogs, something like our Chester Whites, black and white hogs with a sandy mixture in the white, that resembled our Spotted Polands in color. But they were great improvements on the first razorbacks. An Adams County pioneer says of the hogs that succeeded the wild hogs in the fifties: "As I look back now over those earlier years, I am more than impressed at the splendid quality of some of the hogs raised on our farm. They were not as good as the present-day hogs, but they were far better than what many people would expect."

Marketing troubles were not over when the rail-

road came. Early trains ran on uncertain schedules and accommodations for live stock were bad, stock cars being nothing more than flat cars with side boards. Up in Fayette County, the first stock train ran into difficulties. A farmer of that section reports: "The engine brought only one car. It was so cold that the little streams around here were frozen over, so water was hauled in barrels a distance of four or five miles. The engine boiled it away as fast as it was hauled. Finally the engine with the loaded stock car moved out of town to a big slough, where the train men tried to get a supply of water but failed. The buyer unloaded his hogs, bought all the corn and straw he could find and kept them until the weather warmed up sufficiently to warrant the engine coming back."

Out in the prairie country, where railroads had not come, the settlers were under a double handicap. They were a long way from market; drives of one hundred and seventy-five miles or more are on record; and they apparently did not have wild hogs trained for long distance work. The razorbacks stayed in the timber, and the prairie settlers brought out better hogs, but hogs that had a harder time on a long trip. Many butchered at home, stored the meat and sold to settlers going West; some hauled the meat to the nearest towns. When they did make long drives, the distances traveled each day were shorter and wagons followed the herd to pick up the cripples. One long drive in 1865 was from Monona

County to Yankton, South Dakota. Ox teams went ahead to leave corn for feed; wagons followed to bring up cripples; the hogs, disliking bridges, had to swim the Floyd and Big Sioux rivers. Since a hog, in swimming, may cut his throat with his sharp fore hoofs, drovers who swam herds across rivers often had to stop and butcher to save the carcasses of hogs that were killed in this way.

Feeding methods, even of these better hogs, remained primitive. "Hogs were turned out on the range in the spring and allowed to forage until fall", writes a Lucas County man. "The sow farrowed out on the range and produced one litter a year. Pigs farrowed in late May or June were not put in the fattening pen until the following year after the new crop was ready to feed." A Crawford County farmer says: "Hogs ran at large, finding shelter in timber tracts and feeding on grass roots, acorns, hazelnuts, wild fruits, artichokes, etc. Rye was sown in small plots and hogs allowed to feed in it until it matured. The shattered grain reseeded itself for several years. Corn and pumpkins were planted and the hogs turned in when they were ripe." It will be noted that "hogging down" is not a modern invention.

Supplementary feeds were rare then. One northwestern Iowa farmer astonished the buyers with hogs that outweighed his neighbors'. He had a fish trap on the Little Sioux and fed fish to the hogs, thus giving them a balanced ration. Another man

reported: "To make pork profitably, hogs should be pastured in the summer; shut up the first of September and started on cooked swill made up of pumpkins, potatoes, beets, carrots, etc., adding two bushels of corn and oatmeal to the barrel. Increase the meal gradually — using little or no roots for the last six weeks — feeding cooked meal, dry corn and water, alternately." Another advanced feeder said: "Hogs should be fed regularly twice a day, should have salt, water, rotten wood and be kept quiet."

With the sixties and seventies, modern breeds began to come in. In addition to the Essex, which arrived early, there were Poland Chinas, Berkshires, and Chester Whites. More corn was fed to hogs; they were shut up longer; and attained a greater weight. With corn cheap and lard comparatively high, hogs were fed out to weights ranging from three hundred to six hundred pounds.

Feeding methods, and hog types have shifted back and forth since the first hogs came into Iowa. Now we market at seven or eight months, at a weight around two hundred twenty pounds, keep hogs on pasture as long as we can, try to get less lard and more lean meat in the finished product, use a variety of supplementary protein feeds in addition to corn, feed minerals, and vaccinate against disease. Yet the hog is still, as he was in 1855, the chief market for Iowa corn; farm income goes up or down with the quotations on hogs at Chicago.

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