

Madera Co-operative Cattle-Handling

(Written for Pacific Rural Press.)

Eight or ten ranchers of the Zebra district in the Sierra foothills of Madera county have a co-operative grazing association formed for the purpose of reducing costs of handling cattle in the Jackass range of the National forests. The range is some fifty miles into the high mountains from the Zebra district. Formerly each was supposed to keep his cattle on that area. As there are no line fences, the cattle of course strayed; and in the fall, each owner would have to send two or three men and about eight horses to scour the entire range before snows came. In that altitude and with all the steep climbing, it was a job to take all of the pep out of men and beasts. This season, the entire Jackass range is assigned to the Association on the basis of the total number of cattle to be grazed by the members—some 1100 or 1200 head, as estimated by I. H. Ward, one of the members. They employed two men at \$125.00 per month to stay on the range, watch the cattle, salt them, and keep track of them. Next fall, when they are to be taken out these men (or one of them) will know where the cattle are; and it will be necessary for each owner to send only enough men and horses to drive them home, eliminating the weeks formerly spent searching all corners of the range.

The owners of the cattle are supposed to stay home and raise feed for them to use in winter, as suggested by Henry Krohn of Coarse Gold, president of the Madera county unit of the California Cattlemen's Association. Moreover, according to Mr. Krohn, the latter association is largely responsible for the Government's policy of refusing a permit to graze in National forests to anyone who doesn't make a practice of providing winter feed and taking good care of stock. The shiftless cattleman is a detriment to the industry, and it is almost a crime to waste the good Government grazing on cattle that are afterward to get thin or starve on insufficient winter feed.

The practice of members of the co-operative grazing association, as outlined by Mr. Ward, is to brand and vaccinate the calves a couple of weeks before they are to arrive at the range, June 15th, the earliest date on which they are allowed there. It takes three or four days on the road. On arrival, they are turned over to the range rider, who also has about 100 head in the association. He keeps track of them, salts them and about mid-September begins to locate them definitely, for they must all be out by October 1. Mr. Ward generally fig-

ures on starting his own cattle out about September 15, and they frequently encounter a storm. Each owner is notified in regard to weather late in the season.

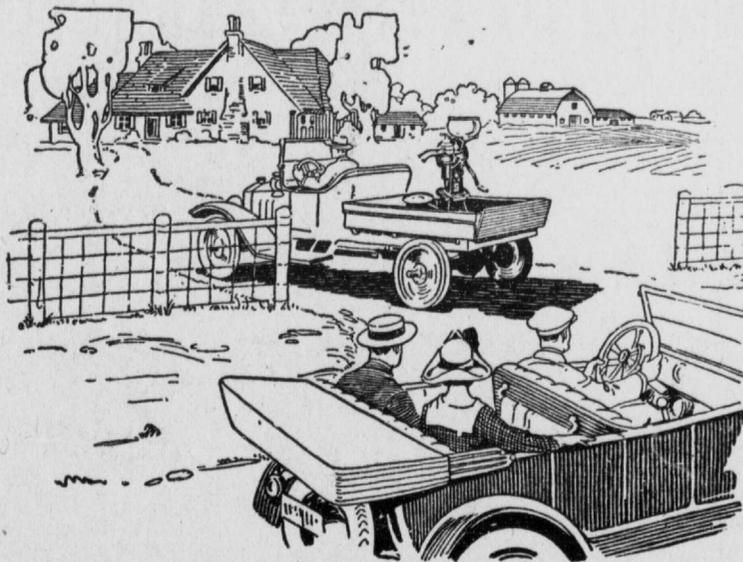
About one bull is sent up per 25 cows and the bulls are of much higher class than they used to be. Quite a number of ranchers bought purebred bulls last spring. Under the State law passed by the 1919 Legislature, all bulls on open ranges must be "purebred" within three years. Both Mr. Krohn and Mr. Ward say that in spite of a few kickers, the use of purebred bulls is becoming quite generally recognized as a means of getting more beef from available feed. Mr. Ward has several cows about three-quarters purebred Hereford which have wintered in better shape than his less well-bred stock. The purebred bulls now on the range are both Shorthorn and Hereford. Cows of the latter breed are preferred by M. Ward because they give enough milk for calves but not so much as to cause bag troubles. He has noted that a uniform lot of "white-faces" bring a better price than common cattle; but the same would be true of any uniform lot of wellbred stock.

Mr. Krohn tells of the County Cattlemen's Association's request that the Government should not permit any bulls on the range until they should be O. K'd by the Association bull committee, both as to quality and number. The Government answered that it would stand by such a proposition. This has helped the sentiment in favor of purebred bulls; and a number of cattlemen who sold out, intending to quit the business, are planning to get back in with better stock and fewer head. One man is planning to raise purebred bulls in this vicinity for sale to his neighbors. Such a practice should do away with the objection that purebred stock is not hardy on the range, for these would be raised there. When cattle are to be taken off the range, about two men each with a saddle horse and a pack horse go after each herd. Mr. Ward's son brought 100 head out along with a dog during the war-scarcity of help; but it kept him hustling. The mature steers and the cows which are fat but unbred or undesirable for breeding are marketed at once. Last fall, Mr. Ward sold about 30 steers out of some 50 cows and had about a score of mature heifers which will be reserved to add to the breeding herd.

The unmarketed stock must be fed over winter. If early rains come as they did in the fall of 1918, they start grass to growing amongst the old dry feed, which is reserved on the ranches for late fall and winter. But last winter and the winter of 1917-18 required considerable feeding of hay and grain. Most of the cattlemen are also ranchers, and they raise a little grain for feed besides a considerable amount of grain hay. Mr. Ward last year had some barley and about 20 tons of hay and 40 tons of wheat straw for his approximately 100 head in addition to the ranch pastures. This year he planted about 75 acres of "corn" broadcast, intending to cut it for hay about the time it was beginning to head; but it made nothing on account of the dry winter. If no rains come before cold weather, he will have to buy feed for his stock to eat next winter until along in March. He will not be lonesome, for Mr. Krohn estimates that not over 25 per cent of the cattlemen in the county raise their own feed. It is also estimated that not more than 30 per cent of the cattle in the country are sent to the mountains for the summer. Generally those that are not, are fed in winter and marketed in the spring without holding them on dry grass feed.

Only the Jackass range is being grazed co-operatively this season, trying out an experiment which has also been tried in some other counties. It seems to be proving highly satisfactory.

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