THE MARKETING OF ARIZONA RANGE CATTLE

Can a Scheme of Cooperative Marketing for the Range Man's Product be Made Successful?

By G. K. York

Cooperative marketing has been held up to the farmer and producer as the panacea that would cure all the ills of Christendom. Many producers, for instance the California citrus growers, have used cooperative marketing with wonderful success. At the present time the California Cattle Grower's Association is organizing a plan of cooperative marketing of livestock that will be of interest to the cattle feeders in Arizona. This plan, however interesting it may be to the range man, does not help him a great deal with his problem which is in reality a thousand problems in one. Many a producer of range cattle has asked himself and his neighbor, "Can we use cooperative marketing in our business in such a manner that it will bring us a larger share of profit and stabilize our business?"

To answer a question of this sort necessitates an analysis of the range cattle business. The production of range cattle is very complex, involving problems of general economics, agricultural economics, farm management, and range management. The ranchman needs to know the carrying capacity of his ranges, the relation of his permanent improvements to the cost of production, and the most efficient amount of movable capital required to profitably operate his own particular ranch.

From all appearances, cooperative marketing for the range man is in the future. The fundamental units of the foundation upon which cooperative marketing stands are Standardization of Product, Loyalty, Willingness to Cooperate, Large Enough Volume of Business for Efficient Organization, Continuity of Business, and Leadership. To find out how many of the foregoing any ranching community may possess would require an extensive and thorough survey of every factor concerned in marketing from the producing community to the ultimate consumer.

Arizona is primarily a producer of stocker and feeder cattle, and the only source of income is from the range calves. The value of the calf at weaning time must cover the cost of keeping the cow for a year, depreciation, sire service, interest on the investment, rent, and losses, and still leave a margin for the owner. This holds true whether one is producing calves to sell at weaning time or to sell as two year old feeders.

Economy demands that grazing be made use of to the fullest extent; that where winter feeding is practised the feeds shall be of a cheap nature, and that no more be fed than necessary to keep the stock in thrifty condition. It is not economy to let stock get thin in winter for lack of feed, as cows will raise more and better calves, and there will be fewer losses if the cows are kept up in weight. Increasing the calf crop to the same number of cows, cuts down overhead, thus increasing profit.

One way to increase the profit per calf is to increase the selling value. This increased value is usually the result of better breeding and selection. The cattle feeder in selecting stockers and feeders, aims to get animals that will put on gains economically either in the feed lot or on grass. He also wants the animals to be of such a type that they will bring the best price when finished. The feeder steer is not so fat, but must show good evidence of fattening ability. Since the Arizona range man is in the business of producing range cattle for the feed lot, he should give the market a product for which there is a good demand at a good price. This would mean a great step forward in the standardization of his product, and if he is to enter cooperative marketing with any degree of success he MUST standardize his product.

Ranching lends itself easily to credit financing and consequently is financed very largely by credit. Statistics show that as an average over 50% of the ranchers are unable to control the time of marketing when under financial pressure. If loans are called livestock must be marketed to meet

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CHAMPION ARIZONA DAIRY COW

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doors. This seeming abundance of the products in the hands of the ranchmen and scarcity at the doors of the consumers have often been attributed to the activities of middlemen. In recent years farmers' and ranchers' organizations have begun to recognize this distinction and to insist that the scarcity at the consumer's end of the line be made the basis of price, and its distribution be made backward to the producer through the necessary steps in marketing.

If in the past competition has not worked perfectly and prices have not been the resultant of supply and demand, the blame can hardly be placed upon the farmer and ranchman. They have not only done nothing to interfere with free competition, but until recent times they have not even done anything to defend themselves against those who may have combined to determine the prices of what they bought and sold. If, therefore, they are to be blamed at all it is for their sins of omission rather than their sins of commission. They have failed to organize for the purpose of acquiring bargaining strength comparable with that of the industrial and commercial concerns with which they have dealt. Farmers and ranchmen have so far lagged behind their brothers in the industrial and commercial world in the matter of organization for business purposes. If the Arizona rancher expects to profitably market his product, cooperatively or otherwise, he must first put his ranch on a business basis and produce a product that is uniform and attractive and will bring a good price on the market with a correspondingly good profit to himself.

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