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ACROSS THE ISLAND

Brown Swiss Cattle Impress

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THE 700-ACRE Black River Farm with some of the world's best Brown Swiss cattle blood lines exists in the Brackley - Covehead area of this province., I've found, because an O'Leary girl brought all of her loving care, loyalty and skill to the task of nursing an invalid Rhode Island lady many years ago.

I've often wondered why retired manufacturer Rathburn Willard, 80, of Scituate, Rhode Island should come to tiny P.E.I. and spend a large sum of money to develop this big project. Mr. Willard emphasized he didn't want his name used in anything I might write about the farm, but I have to tell you this part of the story because it explains why he came here.

BECAUSE of the splendid work the O'Leary girl did in nursing Mr. Willard's mother, "she came to be regarded more like a member of the family than someone who worked for us", Mr. Willard told me recently. Since then he has had many other Islanders work for him, and he "always found them reliable, completely honest and loyal."

So he wants to do something that will help the Island and to have the money he spends here become useful to P.E.I. because of the affection he's developed for the province which he has been visiting now for more than 40 years.

The first heifers from his mature cows will be coming into production next year, and he will make them available to Island cattlemen at a price considerably less than he could get for them elsewhere.

Outstanding Cattle At Black River

THEY DO have outstanding cattle at Black River Farm, I found this week when Ronald Dolloff, genial farm manager, showed me around the establishment and allowed me to search through some of the production records. The herd has been built on foundation stock obtained for the most part from Lee's Hill Farm, New Vernon, New Jersey, where they have been improving the breed for 70 years, and have developed some of the world's best producers.

Born in an urban center, Ronald was Mr. Willard's chauffeur, and had no previous farm experience, except for the time he spent on his uncle's farm during school vacations. But he's intensely interested in the herd, has achieved a top production with one cow of 19,350 pounds of milk and is eagerly awaiting the time he can push one past 20,000. Four animals in the stable have surpassed 16,000 pounds of milk and one of them produced 23,482 pounds of milk, 1,032 fat as a 5-year-old before she came to the Island.

OFFICIAL "RECORD of Performance reports for Canadian purebred dairy cattle 1061-62" indicate that Brown Swiss on P.E.I. with an average production of 11,560 pounds milk, 556 butterfat, had the highest average butterfat production for any breed in Canada. The P.E.I. cattle referred to were the Black River herd of 22 cows on test. They averaged four years of age and their breed class averages - a comparison with cows of the breed across the nation - were 130 per cent in milk, 156 in fat. Holsteins in British Columbia were closest with an average of 475 pounds fat on 2,120 records.

P.E.I. Holsteins, by comparison, produced an average of 10,530 pounds milk, 391 fat on 521 records for BCAs of 98 and 101, the official report indicates.

It's not a completely fair comparison, of course, for the report compares one herd of highly bred, hand picked cattle with hundreds of herds in other breeds across the country. But it does indicate, I suggest, the high production that this breed can develop, as well as the quality of the herd that is being built up here.

Some Outstanding Records Seen

A SEARCH of records revealed, for example, that two full sisters in the herd have turned in a couple of fairly respectable performances since they were brought here. Hidden View Autumn Azalea produced 16,955 pounds milk, 720 fat in 305 days and 19,032 milk, 817 fat in 354 days as a five-year old cow. Her sister, Hidden View Autumn Azure, produced as a two-year old 13,310 milk, 616 fat in 305 days.

The best Brown Swiss production thus far was the 34,810 pounds milk, 1,733 fat which was a world record when it was completed in April, 1959 on three-times-a-day milking. Mr. Dolloff told me the Brown Swiss often develop the production capacity until they are 10 years or more, and are useful to 15 or 16 years. I find the White Cloud Farm cow at Princeton, New Jersey that made the record was more than 12 years old when she completed the lactation. And a Lee's Hill Farm cow was 14 years, nine months when she completed a record of 30,360 pounds milk, 1,354 fat in 365 days on twice-a-day milking.

A YOUNG sire at Black River Farm has quality breeding on both sides. His sire and dam were several times grand champions at the Waterloo, Iowa national fair, the supreme test for Brown Swiss in the American show world. His sire was twice grand champion and once reserve at Waterloo and twice grand champ at the Ohio state fair. His dam was grand champion at Waterloo once after dropping triplet calves, and the Black River bull is one of them.

There is also plenty production behind the young sire, Lee's Hill Regal Attache. His dam is a young cow yet but his granddam and his great-granddam on his sire's side both had lifetime records of 10,000 pounds fat, and the highest records of his sire's three nearest dams averaged 31,262 milk, 1,387 fat in 365 days. The highest records of the two nearest dams on his dam's side averaged 25,570 milk, 1,187 fat in 365 days.

Blocky Cows - They Have Production

THE BROWN Swiss are big, blocky cows. Dairy purists from the other breeds we have here would frown on their type. A judge looks for a trim cow, with thin neck and

withers sloping down to the shoulder. Breeders and showmen clip the neck and withers to accentuate that appearance. But the Brown Swiss cow has a heavy neck, with blocky withers. They're big all over. Yet they have proven their productive capacity, so nobody is worrying over type. Mr. Dolloff tells me they get steers up to 1,000 pounds at one year, and three-year- old heifers have hit 1,600 pounds.

They're quiet cows that are easily handled. The only nervous animal I saw in the big stable had arrived 12 hours previous to my visit, and she had not recovered from her long ride in a small truck.

The herd has naturally attracted a great deal of attention and they will be featured on Country Calendar on Sunday afternoon.

Weather Is Awful - Could Be Worse

THE KINDEST thing we can say about this year's weather is that it might have been worse. A clipping from Hazzard's Gazette in our library records that hail lay on the ground nine inches deep on a July day in 1844, and farm crops in most areas were a total loss. But here is a real shocker: "Hail stones at one place smashed a cart shaft and knocked the horse down". That's from the Gazette issue of June 30, 1844.

Another Gazette item said hailstones in 1843 stripped potato plants so bare nothing but the stalks remained. Apple and cherry trees were stripped bare.

Many of the hailstones in a yard on the Union Road "were the size of pullets' eggs". Sheep and cattle in the pasture were bleating and roaring in terror, but nobody dared to go outside to look after them. "Many of the hailstones were square in shape and three inches across", another Gazette item reported. That weather was really rough.

Good Advertising For P.E.I.

FRED NASH, district supervisor, poultry products division, Canada department of agriculture told me recently he had seen P.E.I. prominently displayed on a huge relief map of Canada, on the wall of a building at the Eisenhower dam, across the St. Lawrence River from Cornwall.

It was described as "the fairest land that may be seen, full of goodly meadows and trees", a Jacques Cartier description that still serves as mighty good advertising copy at times.

MR. NASH was referring to the contrast this Eisenhower dam building map presented compared to the many times the Island is left off maps completely.

Boosts for P.E.I. crop up, though, in some unusual places. I remember buying a box of matches for my long time friend, Rev. Fred Cass, when he was in Ottawa with the St. Dunstan's University debating team he coached to a Canadian Intercollegiate victory in 1956. Glancing at the box I saw the statement "Prince Edward Island grows the best seed potatoes in the world." I had never seen that on a match box before, nor have I seen it since.