

Fodder Problem.*

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Honoured Sir, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Pardon me if I presume to rise and speak to you on a question which has the outstanding merit of being the life study of our friend Mr. Pattagar and his family for generations past. It is an ever recurring problem,—one that presents manifold aspects for being dealt with. In my official duties, I was partly bound up with the cattle problem both from a feeding and a breeding point of view: of course more from the former aspect than from the latter. I chose this as my subject to-day as being more appropriate to the audience here and propose to place before you a few of my experiences.

Grazing areas have become more and more restricted with the increase of the area under cultivation. The present system of cultivation has been tending to be more and more intensive, and the labour requirements of the ryot, therefore, can hardly be met without improving the cattle both physically and numerically. The Coimbatore ryot bestows great care on cattle. He has his cattle kept under the same roof as it were as himself. Their feeding troughs and fodder stacks are always kept open to his view. He is accustomed to raising fodder crops and values them even more than his grain crops. This sort of attention is now getting more and more confined to his mhote and cart bullocks as the scope of his work increases and his cattle-maintaining resources get curtailed. As circumstances stand at present, it is impossible to reduce the area under non-fodder-yielding industrial crops. This, with the insufficiency of pasture, calls for the adoption of stall feeding to a greater extent than heretofore. Stall feeding with exercise is found as good for the animals as feeding them on a pasture. The healthy condition of the Central Farm animals numbering 340 in all with but 30 acres of grazing area proves this statement to the hilt.

* Paper read at the Tirupur Cattle and Pony Show, 31st May 1923.

In addition to growing occasional fodder crops in any garden I would appeal to the ryots here to put down a permanent fodder area under Elephant grass, Guinea grass and Lucerne. The first two do not require much attention to grow. The Elephant grass yields over 150 cartloads of green fodder per acre in a year, while Guinea grass, which is a softer grass, yields over 120 cartloads. If the crops are manured well and given occasional irrigations with intercultivation after each cutting, they will be found to stand well in the same field for over three years. As the stubbles grow big, they can be quartered and given a heavy dose of manure. This will put fresh vigour into the crop, which will maintain a vigorous growth for another three years. I have got ten-year old Guinea grass areas doing well on the Central Farm.

Lucerne, however, requires a little more attention on the part of the grower, but yields a much richer fodder. Small daily rations of it per animal will enable a ryot to do away with more costly concentrated feed, thus making the maintenance of the herd cheaper.

There is a good deal of waste when the ryots plough in or throw away the thinnings of a young cholam crop because animals get poisoned when fed on them. It has been proved that such plants, when made into silage, lose their poisonous properties and can be preserved for a long time and kept in a state as good as green fodder. For making silage of them the thinnings have to be exposed to the sun for a day and placed well packed in a pit dug in the ground. After putting the stuff in, the pit must be closed tight in order to exclude rain water and air.

In some parts, I have seen ryots feeding the cattle especially the cart bullocks on a journey with unbroken cotton seed. It is all a waste in my opinion and I would suggest to them to crush the dry feed in an ordinary mortar and pestle.

Before I close, I wish to speak a word about the milk herd also. The demand for milk is ever on the increase. The increasing number of coffee restaurants and the popularity of the beverage are evidences in proof of my statement and it is high time for the ryot as the producer of food for the millions to think of increasing

his output of milk. Very little is being done in this direction at present. Neither the religion of the ryot nor his sentiment sanctions his present neglect of the cow. He seems to look upon the cow as but a machine to produce his future work animals and also to give him his store of manure. The cow stands for much more than that. She should be fed and looked after well if she is to give him good calves that will make strong work cattle. Moreover her maintenance can be made a profitable business if some trouble is taken to increase her milk flow by judicious feeding. The cow requires a certain amount of concentrated food and green stuff mixed with dry fodder to maintain her yielding capacity, and our cows are generally poor yielders, because we have been for generations feeding them indifferently on materials that are too poor to be fed even to work-bullocks. I, therefore, appeal to you one and all to seek advice on this subject from the Deputy Director of Agriculture, Livestock, who is ever working at the improvement of the milking and the working capacity of the animals.

I may further add, by the way, that the scope of business in milk and other dairy products can be considerably expanded, if the producers aim at transporting them to distant places. Very few people are now aware of the great demand there is for unadulterated butter from various parts of the presidency. If you charge the full price of milk and the manufacturing charges with a small profit on butter alone, the curd and the butter milk will be a direct gain in the business. It will not be very difficult to realise anything near Rs. 2 for a pound of good butter. The business can very well be organised and conducted on a co-operative basis under the guidance of a Co-operative Society.

I thank the Committee for the opportunity they have given me of speaking to the ryots direct on a subject which is dear to them as well as to me and I should here acknowledge my obligation to Mr. C. Narayana Ayyar to whose kind suggestion the present paper on the fodder problem is due.

And finally, I thank you, ladies and gentlemen, for the kind and patient hearing you have been good enough to give me.
