

Milk and meat



A Hereford bull with Friesian heifers

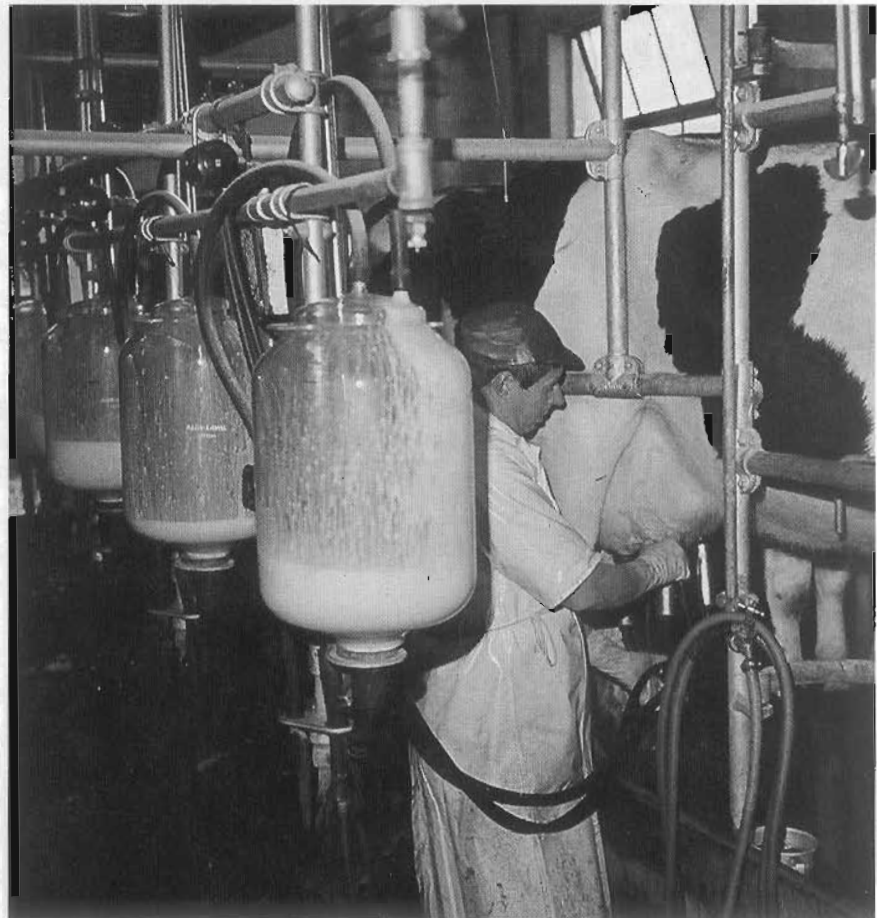
Right, below: Cows being milked by machine

Below: Cattle grazing on pasture



One of the most important types of farming in Britain is dairying. A dairy farm is one where only dairy cattle are kept. Some dairy cattle are also kept on mixed farms. Three million or so dairy cows provide us with milk and milk products such as cheese, butter, cream and yoghurt.

The average size of a herd on a modern dairy farm is about 50 cows. This is just about the number that can be carefully looked after by one cowman. Cows that have given birth to calves will produce milk for about eight months afterwards. They have to be milked twice a day, seven days a week. The milking parlour is part of the main farm buildings. The cows are brought in from the fields and led into stalls. They are fed a carefully balanced mixture of barley or other grains and a special cattle food called 'cake'. At the same time they are milked by electric milking machine. The milk given by each cow is measured and automatically pumped to the cooler. At regular intervals it is collected by a milk tanker and taken to the local dairy.

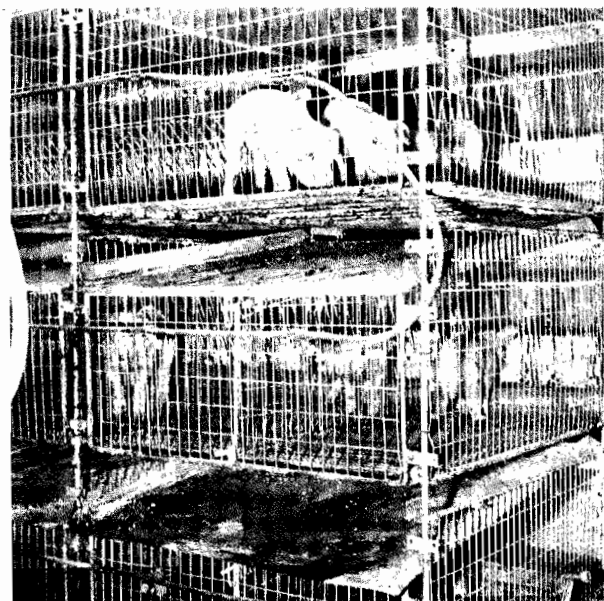


Many of the fields will be in grass, either as permanent pasture on wetter lands or sown grass as part of a rotation of crops. Some will be grazed by the cows while the rest will be cut for hay or silage. Other fields will be used for growing crops such as oats, barley or kale for fodder or wheat, barley, roots and vegetables for sale.

The dairy farmer gets his income from the sale of milk to the Milk Marketing Board and the sale of the male calves for fattening up as veal or beef. He keeps some of the female calves (called heifers) to add to his own herd and sells the others to other dairy herds.

The best conditions for dairying and fattening cattle are in places with mild winters with little frost or snow, and where there is moderate rainfall throughout the year. In these conditions the grass should grow well if cared for. It also helps if the land is not too hilly. There are a few areas where dairying is very important – Somerset, South Wales, Cheshire and the lowlands of Scotland for example. Fattening cattle for beef is important in the rich farmlands of the Midlands and in eastern Scotland.

Some farmers specialise in activities such as rearing pigs or keeping chickens. If a farmer does specialise in this way, he or she may keep thousands of animals in a small area to make the best use of land, labour and equipment. This is called intensive farming because so much is put into a small area of land. The most intensive farms reduce the space for each animal to the minimum, with cages in layers like those in the photograph of a pig fattening unit. This has resulted in arguments about what is humane for farm animals.

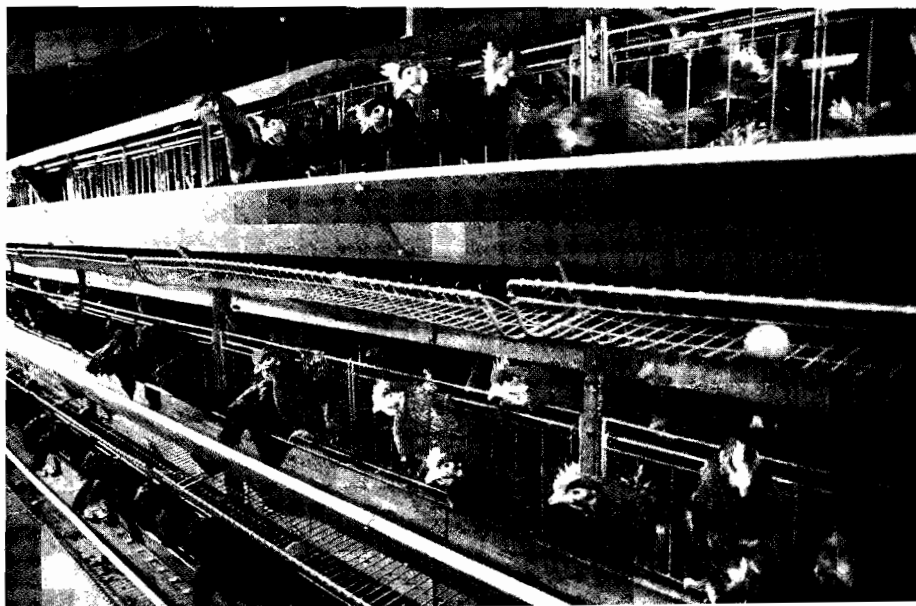


An intensive pig-fattening unit

Farm buildings in Sussex. Do you think that this is a prosperous farm?



- 1 Jerseys and Ayrshires are important dairy cattle breeds. An important beef cattle breed is the Hereford. Where are these places?
- 2 Look at the butter and other dairy produce in your local grocer's shop or supermarket. Name the main brands and the countries they come from.
- 3 Draw a sketch of the dairy cattle scene on page 34, and label to show some of the features that make it good cattle farming country.
- 4 Many poultry, pigs and some cattle are nowadays raised in intensive farm units – sometimes called 'factory farming'. What does this mean? What are the arguments for and against factory farming?



Battery chickens. Eggs produced in this way are usually cheaper than free range eggs