

As is the case in other lines of livestock and poultry, cows are raised in all districts without pronounced regional concentration. In each district the tendency is to have several hundred cows raised close to urban centres, where they dispose of milk and yoghurt without much use of cold storage before delivery to retail terminals.

Consumption and nutritional importance

Cows are raised mainly for milk, and meat is a secondary product derived from the slaughter of culled cows, bulls, and calves. Table (IX-5) shows that cattle provide around 4,000 tons of meat (29 percent of total meat consumption), whereas sheep and goats produce 2.4 times more meat and 1.6 times more milk.

Cow milk is consumed mostly fresh, and it is usually distributed without any interim cooling. Although no bacterial tests have been conducted, there is no doubt that the bacterial count of milk often exceeds permissible limits by the time it gets to consumers' homes. This is particularly true in most months of the year when the temperature is over 70°F for more than 15 hours a day. These hazards are all the more worrying in view of the fact that most liquid milk is consumed by young children and patients.

A major product processed from cow milk is yoghurt. Due to primitive processing techniques and inadequate cold storage, the quality of local yoghurt is also noticeably poor, but that does not seem to constitute an important hygienic hazard because of yoghurt's high acidity. This is also true of labaneh, which is prepared by partial straining of yoghurt.

Small quantities of cow milk go into making soft white cheese. Unlike

cheese made of sheep and goat milk, cow cheese does not store for long and has to be consumed fresh.

Husbandry practices

As was mentioned earlier, the vast majority of cows are kept by peasants as a side line to other types of agriculture or business. The number of farms where the number of milking cows exceeds five is estimated by extension specialists to be less than 40.

Most cows belong to the Baladi group, which is a heterogeneous indigenous strain characterized by the single advantage of being adapted to local conditions, especially poor nutritional standards. Their production, on the other hand, is very modest. Average milk output per year is estimated at 500 litres, as compared with 3750 litres for local Freisians.¹ Likewise, their rate of growth and feed conversion are also poor.

Feeding standards are not much above the genetic aptitude of Baladi cows. The diet consists largely of straw, barley and vetch, in addition to excessive seasonal use of wild grasses and farm refuse. Unlike poultry, cattle feeding has made very little use of ready-to-serve concentrates manufactured by local or Israeli mills.

The health of cattle is often deficient. Worms, external parasites, and Mastitis are all common problems, but virulent infections are somewhat rare. Farmers have little experience in diagnosis and treatment of diseases, whereas the veterinarians in the Department of Agriculture have been instructed not to accept on-farm calls. Although mortality is not particularly high, the cows' performance (as measured in milk and meat production) is frequently badly affected.

1. Estimates of the Planning Unit in the Department of Agriculture.