

*Cattle - Cost of prod. o.s.*

**AN ASSESSMENT OF BEEF PRODUCTION  
IN TRADITIONAL DAIRYING AREAS  
OF THE FAR NORTH COAST OF N.S.W.**

B.J. STANDEN

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New South Wales Department of Agriculture  
Division of Marketing and Economics

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the eight shires of the Richmond-Tweed Statistical Subdivision<sup>(1)</sup> the numbers of beef cattle and beef cattle producers have increased rapidly over the last decade. Between 1965 and 1971 beef cattle numbers increased by 85 per cent to 386,000. This increase has roughly corresponded to the decline in the number of dairy cattle. In 1965 beef cattle comprised 38.8 per cent of all cattle but by 1971 this percentage had risen to 67.7 per cent of the total.

In 1971 in the Richmond-Tweed shires there were just over 3,000 holdings with beef herds containing twenty or more head of cattle. A further 1,800 were located in the Clarence shires. Little appears to have been documented about the nature of these holdings. In the western parts of the region beef production is a specialist activity on relatively large holdings. Towards the coast, beef grazing is commonly found as a sideline to dairying and other enterprises such as sugar cane and bananas. Especially in the coastal shires beef is often seen as the enterprise of part-time farming with landowners either semi-retired or having off-farm employment.

Table 1 gives some information on the extent to which beef cattle are run on dairy farms. About 20 per cent of beef cattle in the Richmond-Tweed shires are found on dairy farms but the percentage appears to be declining though not the absolute numbers. This percentage is much less in the Clarence shires being about 7 per cent in recent years. All but a few of the 2,936 dairy farms on the North Coast in 1971 ran beef cattle and the average size of beef herds on dairy farms was about 29 head.

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(1)

The North Coast Statistical Division contains the Sub-divisions of Richmond-Tweed, Clarence and Hastings which was added very recently. The North Coast region for the purposes of this paper comprises the Richmond-Tweed and Clarence Sub-divisions; it extends from the Queensland border south to and including Nambucca shire.

TABLE 1Number and Percentage of Beef Cattle on Dairy Farms

<u>Richmond-Tweed</u>	<u>1969</u>	<u>1971</u>
Beef Cattle on dairy farms	55,399	63,009
Beef Cattle on other holdings	248,889	322,552
Percentage Beef Cattle on dairy farms	18.21	16.34
<u>Clarence</u>		
Beef Cattle on dairy farms	17,764	18,140
Beef Cattle on other holdings	226,350	261,330
Per Cent Beef Cattle on dairy farms	7.28	6.49

Source: Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics

The range of sizes of beef cattle herds is one indicator of the nature of holdings producing beef cattle. The size distribution of beef cattle herds for the North Coast region as a whole is given in Table 2. Unfortunately size distributions are not available for Sub-divisions or shires so that traditional beef producing areas, and areas currently changing from dairying cannot be distinguished. The size distribution of herds is given for four points in time between 1956 and 1969 the last year for which the distribution is available. It can be seen that the number of herds in all size classifications has increased between 1956 and 1969 but the greatest increase has been in the number of herds with fewer than 200 head.

Table 2 also shows that fewer than 750 of the 4,463 beef herds on the North Coast in 1969 contained more than 200 head of cattle; fewer than 420 herds contained more than 300 head. It needs to be emphasised that the size of herds is measured by counting all animals including calves and replacement stock as well as adult cattle. It is measured at the end of March when perhaps the greatest number of calves and young stock are in the herds.

This classification of the size of North Coast beef herds is particularly significant when compared with the Home Maintenance Standards set down by the Closer Settlement Advisory Board (now the Rural Assistance Board). Home Maintenance Standards specify the minimum number of animals

TABLE 2  
Distribution of Beef Cattle Herds by Size of Herd  
North Coast Region

Number of Cattle in Herd	Number of Herds at March				Per Cent Increase 1956 to 1969
	1956	1960	1965	1969	
20 - 49	668	769	1034	1345	101
50 - 99	496	654	909	1354	173
100 - 149	250	320	420	686	174
150 - 199	149	174	246	334	124
200 - 299	178	195	262	328	84
300 - 499	135	179	191	260	93
500 or more	98	103	134	156	59
Total	1974	2394	3196	4463	126

Source: Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics.

required to "maintain an average family in average circumstances". These standards can be criticised especially because they do not consider the level of owner equity but even assuming high levels of owner equity they are often too low.

Disregarding these criticisms the current standards for beef units are:

320 breeders for breeding (without fattening) herds.

250 breeders for herds producing vealers.

These standards suggest that no more than a few hundred beef herds on the entire North Coast are of sufficient size to be the basis of efficient full time units.

It is useful to examine the range of herd sizes on holdings that fall into particular ranges of area. Table 3 sets out the range of herd sizes on holdings of less than 400 hectares and of less than 200 hectares. There would be few holdings exceeding 400 hectares in areas changing from dairying to beef. Table 3 should therefore give some indication of the maximum number of beef units of various sizes in traditional dairying areas. If this proposition is acceptable then Table 3 indicates that there could be fewer than a hundred beef herds providing the basis for efficient full time units in traditional dairying areas throughout the entire North Coast.

TABLE 3

Size of Beef Cattle Herds on Farms of Less than  
400 and 200 hectares, 1969

North Coast Region

Number of Cattle in Herd	Less than 400 hectares	Less than 200 hectares
20 - 49	1307	1188
50 - 99	1271	1078
100 - 149	592	438
150 - 199	241	142
200 - 299	176	80
300 - 499	53	7
500 or more	6	1

Source: Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics.

These results suggest that the economic status of large numbers of beef producers throughout the North Coast may be unsatisfactory. The rapid swing to beef in traditional dairying areas might merely be replacing one low income problem with another. Particularly in these areas, operators changing to beef, new operators buying-in, administrators of reconstruction programmes and lending authorities seek and need to know the economic status of existing producers and the requirements and prospects for successful and profitable beef production by new producers.

To provide some of this information two surveys were made of beef producers in four traditional dairying shires of the Richmond-Tweed in 1971 and 1972.