

DON M. SMITH

**The Man Behind
the
One in Front**

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The Man Behind the One in Front

*by Reuben Albaugh**

Don M. Smith, well-known county director and livestock farm advisor, emeritus, of Tehama County, and I sat reminiscing in the old Crystal Motel at Red Bluff. It was bull sale time and bulls and men of every known pedigree were invading this old and historical cow town. Don was enthusiastic, relaxed, jovial, ebullient and anxious to cooperate in relating the details of his full and useful life.

To those in the know, Red Bluff, Don Smith, and the bull sale are synonymous. You cannot talk about one without thinking of the other; they ride the range together, stirrup to stirrup.

I stretched my imagination to picture Don as a barefoot boy in the corn fields of Iowa, where already he was developing that rare and intangible trait called character that comes so often to those that live close to the soil. I pictured him with his shiny dinner pail, "piking" off to school with Henry A. Wallace, former vice president of the United States and secretary of agriculture, under the F. D. Roosevelt democratic administration of the New Deal 30's.

I imagined him mastering the three R's through grade and high school, already a spirited leader and a brilliant student. I followed him through Iowa State College where he majored in animal science, working his way through the institution by managing a laundry. Studying lecture notes of top students in various subjects allowed Don to skip classes, but he passed these examinations with flying colors.

In 1917 Don married Margaret Frazer, who was at that time secretary to the dean of the School of Veterinary Medicine, Iowa State College. Don and Margaret raised four children—Don A., Dick, Jean and Marcia. All four are following successful, worthwhile careers.

He enlisted in the U. S. Army and distinguished himself in Flanders' Fields during World War I, the war supposed to end all wars. It was here that he helped crush the German army and then added life to the song that was so popular, "Over There." Upon returning, he successfully managed several large ranches in southern California. Here he supervised one of the largest Duroc Jersey hog ranches in the United States.

**Extension Animal Scientist, Emeritus, UC at Davis.*

BEGAN EXTENSION CAREER IN 1921

I saw him enter the Agricultural Extension Service in 1921 and under the guidance and stimulation of B. H. Crocheron, then director of Agricultural Extension Service, he became one of the most effective farm advisors in all the western country.

It was in Stanislaus County that he began as an assistant farm advisor. Here he organized a cow testing association of over 5,000 cows with the help of many important people including Carl Wente, banker and later president of Bank of America; Sam Greene of the California Dairy Council; and G. Eddy Gordon, that renowned first Extension dairy specialist. It was here Don learned that when you got people helping voluntarily you give them the credit. "Giving credit to the other fellow is like bread cast upon the water; it comes back a thousand fold," he said.

He was transferred to Tehama County as the first farm advisor in 1923, and I watched him working with the cattle and sheepmen during the dreaded hoof and mouth disease epidemic in 1924. Here he assisted in inspecting more than 70,000 cattle and 200,000 sheep. I saw him organize the first olive conference, which resulted in an increase in county appropriation and paved the way for the appointment of Grant Merrill as assistant farm advisor. The Smith-Merrill team was compatible and effective in teaching and research, and built an excellent Extension program.

He worked with farm youth, 4-H Club boys and girls, the most important crop in Tehama County, and trained them in the improved practices of agriculture leadership and good citizenship. Under Don's regime and guidance, Tehama county produced more senior 4-H members than any California county.

I saw Don establish feeding tests with hogs and sheep to prove the value of adding protein to their diet. Don was the first California farm advisor to demonstrate the value of balancing barley with high protein feeds (such as meat scraps) in livestock rations. He organized and promoted the Tehama Livestock Marketing Association, an organization that was successful for years in selling 8,000 to 10,000 hogs annually, and bringing thousands of dollars of added income to farmers in Tehama and surrounding counties.

HELPED DEVELOP ASSOCIATIONS

Also in the field of marketing, Don was instrumental in helping to organize the Valley Livestock Marketing Association at Red Bluff. This organization markets hundreds of head of beef cattle each year, performing an important service to the beef cattle industry in California, Oregon, and Nevada.

I admired his full utilization of the resources of the University of California and his close cooperation with the Animal Science Department. Here distinguished men like George Hart, Elmer Hughes, Bobby Miller, Jim Wilson, and Bill Regan were extremely helpful in carrying out his many and varied Extension activities.

I watched him as secretary of the Northern California Wool Growers' Association where he lectured and pleaded for cooperation and unity among the sheepmen of that area. With the help of Chet Wing, secretary, California Wool Growers' Association, I saw him organize the strong and influential committee for the control of predatory animals. For his untiring efforts on behalf of the sheepmen, he was chosen as a member of the Order of Golden Fleece.

Ray Anchordoguy, prominent sheepman of Tehama County, stated that Don Smith took him out of a sheep camp and made him a sheepman instead of a shepherd. When Ray took over the management of his sheep ranch, the average weaning weight of the lambs was approximately 80 pounds and percent of lamb crop was 90 percent. With his management and Don Smith's assistance, the percentage of lamb crop was increased to 140 percent and weight of lambs to 95 pounds.

In 1924 Don organized the Tehama County Dairy Herd Improvement Association which encompassed Tehama, Shasta, Butte and Glenn Counties. The average milk and butterfat production at that time was 6,500 and 260 pounds, respectively. In 1946 the average milk production among Tehama County herds had increased to 8,500 pounds and butterfat production to 340 pounds. This was due to culling, use of high-producing bulls, and better feeding practices which Don demonstrated and advocated. A conservative estimate indicates that this project alone added over half a million dollars annually to the Tehama County farm income.

I remember him judging all classes of livestock at county and district fairs and livestock shows. This is a great and versatile accomplishment that comes to few men.

I saw Don training young personnel in the most effective manner in which to carry on Extension work. By example, he taught them to be courteous, thoughtful, and well mannered. He encouraged them to be punctual, to remember names, to be up-to-date on subject matter, and to be forceful and entertaining as speakers. He showed them the value of the written word and the importance of being the man behind the one in front. He encouraged them to be specialists in some field of agricultural production. Those he trained and who later were county directors included: Frank Smith, Ben Ramsaur, Carl Rimbey, John Underhill, Lester Berry, Harry Hinkley, and Leland Frey.

It was stimulating to watch Don Smith counsel with a confused and depressed farmer and then see this tiller of the soil take on new hope and courage in his struggle for success against the elements.

In his home Don was a generous and entertaining host and a thoughtful and loving husband and father.

ORGANIZED RED BLUFF BULL SALE

In his heyday, he organized the popular and unique Red Bluff Bull Sale. For some 20 years, with the help of the Bull Sale Committee (Sam Ayer, Sidney Watson, Roy Owens, Charles Stover, J. T. McKerras, Charley Luther, and L. H. Rochford, first livestock specialist), we watched him promote, organize and expand this worthwhile, far-reaching event. He introduced the University of California grading system into the sale in order to improve the quality of the consignments. He called this sale a buyer's event rather than a breeder's sale. He and his committee did everything humanly possible to protect the buyer, and this made the sale famous throughout the U. S. During the 20 years that Don managed the Red Bluff Bull Sale, approximately 7,000 head of big, rugged, Red Bluff-type bulls were sold. Estimating that these bulls increased weaning weights of calves by 20 pounds and that they produced 80 calves in a four-year period, this meant an increase of 11,200,000 pounds of beef. At 30 cents a pound, this amounted to over \$3 million in added income.

A big feature at this sale was the selling of the "March of Dimes" bull. This event raised more than \$135,000 for this worthy charity. He originated a unique selling system for the March of Dimes by inviting special honorary auctioneers, such as Tennessee Ernie Ford, Pappy Waldorf and the late Max Baer, who was the best of them all in Don's opinion. Don's best gimmick for promoting this sale was the initiation of a special section of the Red Bluff Daily News dedicated to feature articles on beef cattle prepared by county agents and livestock specialists and producers throughout the West. This special feature gave much publicity to the sale.

We were together when he organized the Tri-County Cattlemen's meeting at the Charley Stover ranch in Chester, an event that is still popular with cattlemen. Here he demonstrated without a doubt that bulls graded at the Red Bluff Sale and used on the range for three years or more, maintained the same grade as when sold. This meeting did much to convince cattlemen that visual evaluation such as grading was a highly repeatable practice when performed by skilled and trained judges.

HELPED IRRIGATION DEVELOPMENT

He organized the Sacramento Valley Irrigation Committee and with the help of James K. Carr, Bureau of Reclamation, and many others, the Sacramento Valley canals became a reality. He testified before congressional committees in Washington on the value of increased irrigation in Northern California. He worked closely with Governors Knight and Warren, emphasizing to them the importance of the Sacramento Valley canal system which included the Red Bluff Diversion Dam and the Trinity Dam recommended by "Californians for the Trinity." I saw him receive the pen with which President Truman signed the bill legalizing the Sacramento canals. This was presented to Don by the late Senator Clair Engle.

As Don stood on the banks of the Red Bluff Diversion Dam and watched the snow-laden waters of the Sacramento River diverted into the parched lands of Tehama County, one could clearly see a gleam of satisfaction and pride in his eye. This activity was the big one—a job well done.

Few people have built worthwhile, important monuments reflecting their own accomplishments in the field of agricultural improvement. It was the miner in the Golden Fifties with his pick, pan and shovel that put Red Bluff and Tehama County on the map. But Don Smith's scientific and educational programs in agriculture and related civic activities have spotlighted this old and colorful cow town and county in great style during the past third of a century.

DESERVES TOAST

As I sat talking to him, I thought "Here is a man who successfully championed the cause of the cattleman, sheepman, other farmers, and the farm boys and girls in making life on the land more abundant."

To propose a toast, I would say, "Don, you sat tall in your old battle-scarred Extension saddle; you cast long shadows in the field of education; your furrows of community activities were straight and long. Your loops of scientific knowledge were thrown straight and true. As an organizer and promoter, you have no peer. Your enthusiasm and competitive spirit are contagious and stimulating. You are a man among men—a champion in the corral as well as on the platform."