The College Column

Dr. FRANK X. GASSNER, In Charge of the Colorado Agricultural Experiment Station’s Research Program in Fur-Bearing Animals

A definite relationship for research has been established between the Colorado Agricultural Experiment Station at Colorado State College and the fur farming industry in the state.

This is as it should be. The propagation of fur-bearing animals in Colorado has increased in the last years to such an extent that it now must be considered as an important and sizeable industry. This is attested by the last census, which shows that Colorado now ranks third in the nation in fur-bearing animal production, Wisconsin and Michigan being first and second. Also, the practical knowledge of the fur farmer, which he gained over the years by experience on his own ranch during its development, by analysis of hard knocks suffered in his own herd and of those delivered to his fellow rancher, has gone as far as it can in solving some of the problems of the fur industry in Colorado. There is no livestock industry anywhere which is not confronted by a score of problems which are to a varying degree a hindrance to the further development of that particular industry. Some problems have been with the industry since its inception and probably will remain so. Others are coming to the farmer periodically as often as new trends in breeding, type, feeding and ranch management force the farmer to attempt to fall in line. In other words, the fur farmer is in dire need for technical and scientific help.

There are only a few places in the United States where objective research concerning fur-bearing animals is conducted, New York State and Wisconsin being the most important. Colorado affords many advantages for the fur breeder’s industry, chiefly by virtue of its geographical location and its climate. Like most of the Rocky Mountain states, it is a “young country” and such country always fosters new industry.

However, by reason of climatic and geographic differences, the findings of research in other sections of the country are not necessarily applicable in Colorado. Preliminary observations have shown that the Rocky Mountain region has its own peculiar problems in the propagation of fur-bearing animals. Colorado’s fur breeder’s industry needs its own research program.

Investigations are under way by the Colorado Agricultural Experiment Station on physiology, reproduction and nutrition of fur-bearing animals. A research fellowship has been established to provide additional manpower in the research program and Dr. V. E. Bishop has been working under this fellowship since last September.

Funds are limited, and to get the most out of the experimental program the Experiment Station must receive the positive cooperation of the fur farmer. It is hoped that later an experimental farm may be established at the Experiment Station so that research may be done under strict control. However, until that time the fur farmers must cooperate by calling new problems to the attention of the Experiment Station and by testing experimental results in the field. It is only through the all-out cooperation of a few fur ranchers that the experimental program to date has been made possible. Since early last fall extensive experimentation has been conducted at one particular ranch whose owner has shown cooperative spirit to a high degree. He disregarded personal and financial sacrifice to help carry through some experiments. This meant a loss of time, labor, and material on the part of the rancher who thus sacrificed so that information gained could be given to all fur farmers in the state.

It is important to the success of research on problems of the fur industry that this industry be unified. Much more can be accomplished in cooperation with a unified group than with a group torn by internal strife.

Can results of the experimental program be practically applied? This we can find out only through work with a unified industry.

This column is to appear monthly henceforth and will contain practical information on pressing questions of the fur breeder’s industry.