

SUITABILITY OF UPPER RAMU AREA FOR THE PURPOSES OF GRAZING SHEEP AND CATTLE.

R. F. Brechin.

Local climatic conditions and natural pastures appear to be favorable to both cattle and sheep grazing, provided suitable types of stock are selected.

In these highlands, where the average yearly rainfall does not exceed 80 inches and the temperature range is 45-75 degrees (shade) approximately, together with abundant natural pasture, I suggest that the Red Poll is a breed likely to surpass all others. This breed is the best of the dual purpose types, being a prolific milker and producing a beef that is of first class quality. In addition, the Red Poll is hornless and transmits this characteristic to all other breeds in the first cross. Both sexes are docile and are not likely to cause trouble in country that is heavily populated such as the Ramu.

An investigation into the natural grasses of the Ramu area is being conducted. This work is not yet complete but already ten edible grasses have been found. The condition of Mr. A. J. Peardon's herd of cattle suggests that natural grasses are not lacking in substance or fattening qualities. Mr. Peardon, I believe, has proved beyond any reasonable doubt that Ramu grasslands are well suited to cattle. His herd arrived from Madang four years ago in poor condition. To-day, it is in a good state of health and fat with upwards of 50 calves running on their mothers. The breed of these cattle would be hard to determine, but there is evidence of a fusion of Zebu blood. Provided this area is kept free of cattle tick (and I believe this is possible by subjecting all future importations to a strict inspection) it is unlikely that a dash of Zebu blood will be necessary as the climate is very mild.

There appears little doubt that natural pasture can be improved. *Paspalum* grasses planted on Mr. Peardon's property have grown well and are spreading under grazing. Here, at the station, plots of lucerne (*medicago sativa*), burr clover (*medicago denticulata*) and black medic (*medicago lupulina*) have been established. These have given encouraging results and have seeded heavily. Soy beans, too, under local conditions do remarkably well and have possibilities as a stock food.

In regard to sheep, Romney Marsh or a half cross of this breed with any of the English short-wools, should thrive in this country on the well-drained grassy slopes. Grass shelters could be constructed to which the sheep could retreat during heavy rain. Such shelters are widely used on Australian stud properties; these are cheap to erect and easy to maintain.

Following my own investigations in this area, I can confidently recommend these grass highlands to any settler who wishes to establish cattle and sheep, provided the correct breeds are introduced and care is exercised in the selection of the animals.