

THE NAVY TURNS TO FARMING

At naval bases where land is available officers and ratings are in these days turning their hands to farming as a patriotic and profitable sideline.

Not only have men of the Royal Navy brought many acres of land under cultivation, but they are also rearing livestock and poultry. Such farms are supplying many naval canteens and messes, and also producing useful cash contributions to naval welfare funds from the sale of surplus produce in the outside market.

A typical naval farm, though not the biggest, is that of five-and-a-half acres attached to a naval base and dockyard on the south-east coast where sailors have turned over a portion of their sports grounds for cultivation.

Commander F.D. Morris, R.N., is in charge of operations. He says that when the Base Recreation Ground Fund Committee gave him the land and enough money to make a start, he did not know the first thing about farming. But he has proved such an apt farming administrator that a substantial profit is not the smallest harvest which the unusual naval operation has yielded. The debt to the Recreation Fund has been wiped off, donations have been made to the sailors' sports funds and £800 has been invested in War Loans.

Government marketing schemes apply just as much to this venture as to any other agricultural undertaking. Otherwise the poultry section would be on a much larger scale than it is. Nevertheless, large quantities of geese, ducks and chickens have found their way to the tables of naval messes. While most of the eggs are sold, a large number are a free gift to the local naval hospital.

Two hundred pigs have gone to the local market which reports that the best pigs they handle come from this naval farm. Swill for feeding these pigs is obtained from ships using this base.

Prizes won at agricultural shows are testimony to the high standard of cultivation on this farm. Last year's tomato yield was 2,500 lbs., while the onions tipped the scale at 6,000 lbs. Potatoes, cabbages, sprouts, leeks, celery, carrots, parsnips and asparagus have a correspondingly high yield.

There are no cows to provide the cream, but, in season, there are plenty of beds to provide the strawberries.

The recreation ground staff, working under a retired Chief Petty Officer with 25 years' seagoing service, is the nucleus of the farm staff, but the bulk of the farm hands consist of ratings selected from those who are having a spell of shore duty.

Several sailors, after a period of sick leave, have found their way back to robust health and the sea again by way of this healthy life in the open.

With the aid of a modern motor-propelled plough, one of the proudest possessions of the naval farm, they have proved that the modern sailor is as versatile as his predecessors.

NAVAL AFFAIRS

(PHOTOS AVAILABLE FROM P.N.A.)