MUSK OX PROJECT EXPANDING INTO INTERNATIONAL PROGRAM

Teal to Establish Breeding Station In Canadian Arctic

By HOWARD ROCK
Times Editor

Musk Ox Project of the Institute of Northern Agricultural Research is about to become international in scope.

A breeding station just like the one at the University of Alaska musk ox farm will be established this summer at Old Fort Chimo on Ungava Bay in Canada.

"This is in response to a number of petitions from Eskimo village councils in northern Quebec," said John J. Teal, Jr. who directs the project.

The establishment of musk ox breeding stations will not stop at Fort Chimo. When that is completed, John Teal plans to set one up at Tromso, Norway in 1968 at the request of the Norwegian government. Another will be established at western Greenland in 1969.

The project at Fort Chimo will be in collaboration with the Province of Quebec in the same manner as the one at College, Alaska is operated in collaboration with the University of Alaska that furnished land on which the breeding station is located.

John Teal is set to lead an expedition of "experienced musk ox catchers" to the northernmost Canadian Arctic island, the Ellesmere, this summer to capture calves that will make up the nucleus of the station at Fort Chimo.

The greatest concentration of musk oxen thrive on

(Continued on page 6)

☆ ☆ ☆

Musk Ox Project Expanding . .

(Continued from page 1)

Ellesmere Island numbering about 4,000.

"It's going to be exciting to work on Ellesmere Island because logistical problem there is fierce," said Teal, smiling.

The party will be transported to the island by a Canadian icebreaker with materials to build gas caches and shelters.

"I hope the project will take not more than three weeks," Teal said. Reflecting a moment, he added, "It could be three years, too."

Teal is leaving for Montreal, Canada on August 14 to join and organize the expedition to Ellesmere Island.

CAPTURES IMAGINATION

The Musk Ox Project, ever since its establishment at Huntington, Vermont in 1954 by the Institute of Northern Agricultural Research under John Teal's direction, has captured the imagination of the public.

At that time, musk ox calves were captured with the permission of the Canadian government "providing no adults were killed or injured in the process."

On the first evening of the capture, the calves were force–fed with milk through a rubber nipple.

"The calves would try to drink and get away all at the same time," Teal observed. "By the next day, they recognized the proffered milk can and would walk up to the nipple of their own accord."

Right from the start, the musk ox calves methodically dispelled their projenitor's misplaced reputations of being "legendary monsters" or the "world's most dangerous game animals."

Instead, despite their formidable appearance, they turned out to be easily tamed, intelligent, affectionate and fun–loving animals.

Teal wrote about them at the Huntington farm:

"Taming has been no problem, and now they are easily the tamest animals on the farm even though the bulls are sexually mature, weigh around 900 pounds, and have formidable horns.

"What has surprised us is that they are tamer than our cattle but that they are actually affectionate. Like goats, they enjoy scratching and petting, and will come up to you and rub themselves against you or pick your pocket. This is quite disconcerting with an animal that weighs nearly half a ton!

"If a man is working in their pasture, they will join him for the whole day, nibbling his hammer and testing each board or post.

"They are really captivated by a hole in the ground. They will get in it, butt the banks, scrape dirt away, get out, and then jump back in. Cameras also fascinate them, and it is difficult for a photographer to take a picture because they come up and snuffle around his lens.

"...The musk oxen spend most of their days out at pasture and alternate grazing with vigorous play. A favorite game is 'king of the castle.' If one gets on the top of a mound, all the other musk oxen feel morally obliged to knock him off...

"One hot summer day, my wife and children were down at the pond swimming. They heard some loud splashes and snorts and looked around to see our friends, 'the world's most dangerous game animals,' paddling out to join them.

"Like giant dogs, the musk oxen spent the entire afternoon playing in the water with the children."

Out at the farm at the University of Alaska, herder Terry Hall has found that the animals like to take rides. He has hitched on to a sort of a sled and the musk oxen jump on and ride, jump off and ride again.

Some of them have also learned to pick locks. When the culprit opened the door, he seemed to say, "Here, gang, let's go in and look around," and the "gang" followed and did just that.

(The experience of this newspaper's editor, along with Laura Bergt, chairman of the Eskimo Olympics, was when Larry Rubin, another herder at the university farm, called out, "Hey, Duke. come here!" A large bull rose out of the herd and lumbered over at a half run and came right up to us.)

WHY DOMESTICATION

The musk ox domestication project, funded by W. K. Kellogg Foundation, is an effort to establish herds in northern villages of Alaska and elsewhere, to encourage an industry that has excellent chances of springing up in the Arctic and Subarctic.

"We have requests for domestic musk ox from a number of village councils in Alaska but we haven't yet chosen the first ones to receive herds," said John Teal. "The way of choosing will be based on several points including initiative of the people and the study of the potential of the area for animal husbandry."

"What we are in is not a biological or agricultural project, but rather a project in human ecology–or the introduction of social change," Teal continued.

"In our case, initiative must come from the native people themselves and all the major decisions will be made by them.

"Our Institute will provide the animals, the know–how, higher training and will price–support the products.

"This coming year, we are going to select and invite village councils to choose young men for a year's training and herd management at our station at College.

"When I say 'we' I mean the Institute of Northern Agricultural Research Center at Huntington, Vermont."

Teal said that the Institute "is always the unit" where the project has been going on since 1954. It has served as a pilot study herd.

STUDENT EXCHANGE PROGRAM

The Institute at the present time is working on a program of exchanging native Alaskan students on two levels; first, vocational training and herd management; second, exchanging of scholars interested in higher degrees.

"For example, Eskimo students from Alaska would go to Quebec, Greenland or Norway, and vice versa. Also, say, there can be exchange of students between Lapplanders, other Norwegians, and Alaska.

"We have funds for this program. That, we are going to do," John Teal stated.

GOLDEN FLEECE

A potential that could develop into a valuable industry is, of course, the utilization of the QIVIUT, as the Eskimos call the fine underwool of the musk ox, and which is fast becoming known as the "Golden Fleece of the Arctic."

During late spring each year, a mature musk ox sheds its qiviut about six pounds at a time and each pound of this fleece is worth around $50. There is no need to sheer it as it gradually works itself out from the skin of the animal and through the outer guard hairs.

Teal says that since the animal enjoys petting and scratching and practically asks for help in shedding the coat, "all one has to do is pull off the sheets, a job easier than taking off a sweater."

"The qiviut is a cashmere type wool, though much longer fibered," Teal writes. "It will not shrink when boiled or scrubbed and will take any dye.

"A quarter of pound was enough so that my wife could knit a scarf and have four balls of yarn left over. One pound of qiviut, spun in a forty–strand thread will give a thread nearly twenty–five miles long."

One comparison that should be noted is that to the six pounds of wool shed by a single musk ox, three ounces of "pashm" is shed by a single cashmere goat.

John Teal said that classes in processing musk ox wool will start this winter.

"Ann Schell, our textile expert, is going to start training Eskimo women of the villages how to spin and knit qiviut," said Teal.

Ann Schell is a graduate honor student of the New England School of Textiles.

Meanwhile, John Teal is getting ready to go to the Canadian Arctic to expand the Musk Ox Project into an international program.