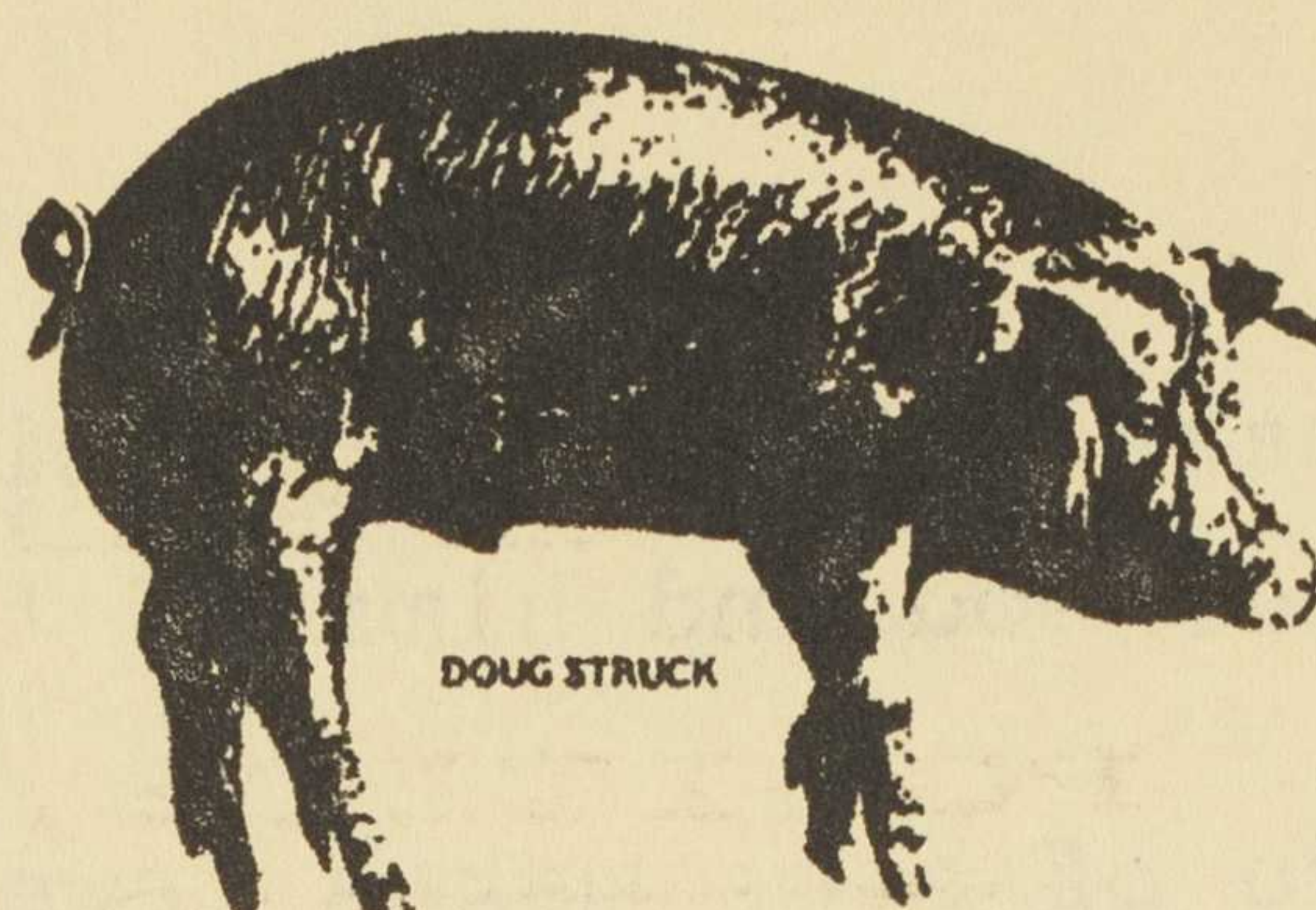


JEWS GO . . .



WHOLE HOG.

Ever since the big wave of ex-Soviet immigration here, business at the Kibbutz Mizra has been just swine. The kibbutz sells pork. The new immigrants can't get enough of it. "Ever since they came, the consumption of pig meat has been going up," said Hadas Senderowicz, manager of the meat packaging plant near Nazareth.

Pork is about as non-kosher as non-kosher gets. But Kibbutz Mizra has long resisted the outcry of the religious orthodox. Kibbutz Mizra, like most collective farms called kibbutzim, was settled by liberal, secular Jews who did not "keep kosher." They did keep pigs, for the same reason as many farmers. The rotund creatures eat about anything, grow like crazy and can make quite a few meals. Some farmers even think pigs are sociable.

In 1962, religious groups in Israel won the first "pig law," prohibiting pigs from being raised on Jewish lands. Ironically, the law spurred the fledgling meat packing business of Kibbutz Mizra. All the other "kubbutzniks" who had gotten accustomed to a bit of bacon from their own pigs with their morning eggs had to buy the meat elsewhere. Kibbutz Mizra moved its pigs to Arab- and Christian-owned lands near Nazareth and cranked up the meat processing plant.

It is now the only non-kosher factory in Israel, employs 120 people and packages 130 products ranging from ostrich meat (which is also forbidden by Jewish dietary laws) to smoked goose breasts to Hungarian sausage.

Supermarkets here do not handle the non-kosher products. But the "Maadaney Mizra" (Mizra Deli) label does

quite well in the hundreds of little non-kosher butcher shops and delicatessens throughout the country.

Mrs. Senderowicz claims 1.2 million customers, in a country of 5 million people, of which 4 million are Jews. One cannot lay all that bacon on the plates of the Arabs; the majority are Muslim, even more strict about avoiding pork! "An awful lot of Jews eat non-kosher," Mrs. Senderowicz concludes.

The success of the business infuriates the orthodox Jewish religious parties. Periodically they clamor for a broader law completely banning pork from Israel, and periodically Mrs. Senderowicz and her fellow "kibbutzniks" march in protest in Jerusalem against the attempt. "Saddam Hussein saved us" in 1991, she said. Just as the ban seemed imminent under the conservative government, the Persian Gulf war diverted attention.

The next such attempt would seem unlikely to cook up much support among Israel's newest citizens from the former Soviet Union. Many of the half-million immigrants have a history of eating pork and economic reasons for still doing so. "It's cheap," said Mrs. Senderowicz. "In the first year they were here, they bought stuff like pig legs and pig fat and livers and kidneys. We never sold that before. Really, we used to throw it away. Now we vacuum package it and sell it." Her kibbutz saw a 10 percent increase in pork product sales in the last two years when Israel received its biggest wave of immigration from the former Soviet Union. — *The Indianapolis News*