

Balancing act in the butchery business

Haggis for Malta, beef for a London banquet . . . what is the secret behind the remarkable national, international and local trade built up by a family firm of butchers at Dornoch?

ROGER MACLEOD reports.



BUTCHERS FOUR: Outside Grants stand the Grants. Left to right, they are: Robert, R. Glen, Charles and Donald F.

customer at around 4s 6d a pound, or shoulder

slaughter." The Dornoch shottair was min

ONE of the perennial troubles of the meat trade is that you have to take beasts designed by nature although the customer is man. In Britain today, man and his wife are opting more and more for the succulent, quick-to-cook, choice cuts of meat. But the meat trader cannot alter his orders accordingly; nature will not oblige. The trader has to take the flank and gigot with the rump. He has to find markets for the lot.

"And then, if you are too good at finding markets for the other cuts," says Dornoch butcher Mr Glen Grant, "you can end up with too many best sirloins on your hands. We have to be constantly working to keep our sales of all cuts in balance."

The Grant family firm has been performing this balancing act in butchery for four generations. It began with great-grandfather Grant bringing slaughtered sheep into Dornoch from his croft, in the back of his cart. By last year, 2750 cattle and 13,000 sheep were passing through the Grant firm's hands. The family has always been good at marketing the rumps, the flanks—and the gigots.

Quality has been the key to the firm's growth, and without it Grants would probably still be little more than a butcher's shop in Dornoch. By being organised to supply top-quality meat all the year round, however, Grants have been able to overcome the disadvantage of rail costs which put 3d or 4d a pound on meat sent from Sutherland to London.

As a result, they are supplying hotels such as the Connaught, and canteens such as British Leyland Motors, and finding only 5 per cent of their turnover as retail sales in their Dornoch shop and branch at Golspie.

The secret of the Grant firm's meat quality is their own 1000-acre farm. They buy in their beasts from the sale rings of Caithness and Ross, but—unlike city butchers—they are never forced to take what the market offers. "If there is nothing of our quality in the market," says Glen Grant, "then we come home and whip some animals in off the farm." With a reserve pool of around 400