

DHIA System Was Begun In Denmark

Depending on your ethnic background, you can argue whether Leif Ericsson and his fellow Vikings or Columbus and his sailing crews were the real discoverers of America.

You can even discuss the merits of Danish modern furniture, Royal Copenhagen china and Red Danish bulls.

But you may not be aware that a Danish immigrant named Helmer Rabild has left a heritage which continues to provide direct benefits to U.S. dairy farmers and indirect benefits to consumers of dairy products.

Rabild was instrumental in organizing the first cow testing association in this country, the forerunner of today's modern, nationwide computerized Dairy Herd Improvement Association record-keeping system.

The organizational meeting of that first association was held on Sept. 26, 1906, in the Grange hall at Fremont, Mich. (Newaygo county), an area famous for furniture-making and fruit-growing. Patterned after similar organizations which had begun 10 years earlier in Denmark, the local Michigan association commenced operations in January 1906.

News of this new development spread rapidly in agricultural circles, and the states of Maine and New York organized similar associations in 1908. The following year, Rabild was called to Washington, D.C., by the U.S. Department of Agriculture to head up a nationwide cow-testing program under the auspices of what was then the USDA's dairy division.

He undoubtedly had a hand in establishing the Maryland program, which began operation in 1911.

Cow testing programs were originally supervised by agencies of the USDA in cooperation with colleges of

agriculture and experiment stations at land-grant colleges. They were taken under the wing of the Cooperative Extension Service when it was organized in 1911.

In 1927 the cow testing associations were redesignated as Dairy Herd Improvement Associations, and the on-the-farm technicians have had their titles changed from cow testers to supervisors.

Under a memorandum of understanding signed in 1952, the associations became quasi-independent. They hire their own supervisors, but continue to receive technical assistance from the Cooperative Extension Service at each land-grant college.

This quasi-independent status led to the formation of a county, state and national organizational structure for DHIA members. The Maryland Dairy Herd Improvement Association, Inc., was founded in 1965. Its aim is to give farmers direct representation at the national policy-making level in dairy record-keeping programs.

Computerization of DHIA record-keeping systems began in 1951 at Utah State University. Today the Utah State operation has evolved into a private agency headquartered at Provo, Utah. It processes the DHIA records for dairy farmers in all or part of 12 states, including Maryland.

There are currently 10 other regional record processing centers providing computerized services. Five of them are operated by state universities such as Penn State. The University of Maryland operated its own center from 1965 to 1969.

Maryland dairy farmers in the DHIA program now receive computer printouts each month from the Utah processing center. These print-outs provide an array of information on individual

cows about which Helmer Rabild and the original cow testing association members could never have dreamed.

Modern dairy record-keeping has developed to a level of refinement that few dairymen can match by themselves, unless they are mathematical wizards, have the use of their own electronic computer, and devote most of their time to this sort of work.

Direct benefits of the DHIA program to dairy farmers have included a tremendous increase in milk production per cow over the years and an awareness of the practical aspects of

genetics in breeding programs to improve overall herd production. This awareness has resulted in the associated national sire-evaluation program, which officially began in 1935.

The total DHIA program has benefitted all dairymen, whether or not they have ever actively participated, declares Dr. Charles M. Chance, Extension DHIA and dairy management specialist at the University of Maryland in College Park.

And it has aided consumers by providing a plentiful supply of wholesome milk and milk products at reasonable

prices. In addition to his normal responsibilities, Dr. Chance and the entire membership of the Maryland Dairy Herd Improvement Corporation are currently involved in planning for the twelfth annual meeting of the National DHIA. It is scheduled March 28-31, 1976, at the Hilton hotel in Baltimore.

Participating host states include Maryland, Delaware

and West Virginia. Since the first two states were included in the Thirteen Original Colonies, it appears appropriate that they should help host the convention during the Bicentennial Year.

The convention, incidentally, will mark 70 years of cow testing activity in the U.S. and 65 years since the forerunner of the DHIA program began operating in Maryland.



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