

Dairy farming still looks good after 60 years

By DIETER KRIEG
JARRETTSVILLE, Md. - When a dairy had surplus milk 60 years ago, there was a simple solution for bringing production back into balance with sales. The creamery merely kept the dairyman's cans, thus leaving him without the means to ship his milk. Delaying or even entirely omitting payments was another way the dairies kept farmers on thin ice. "They'd really beat you," says 84-year old Ross Smith, who began dairying near this Harford County community in 1913.



Ross Smith

Happenings such as these eventually led to the formation of the Maryland State Dairyman's Association, a forerunner of Maryland Cooperative Milk Producers, Inc. Farmers were tired of being at the dairy's mercy. All across the country, milk producers were banding together to form marketing cooperatives.

Quality standards have changed just as dramatically, the veteran dairy farmer recalled. He remembers, for example, once seeing a cat trapped in a 200-gallon vat of cream. Sanitation was almost unheard of at both the dairy as well as the farm. Some farmers systematically added a gallon of water to every can of milk, Smith says.

With respect to today's standards, the octogenarian exclaims: "I don't see how they could have any

improvement on it." His youngest son, Ross Jr., who took over the home farm 11 years ago, milks by pipeline. Beginning next week, they'll be milking their 100 Holsteins in a brand new parlor.

"It pays to be particular for quality," emphasized the elder Smith, whose agility and alertness defy his true age. Having lived through situations which saw the dairy industry at its depths, he has high praise for modern dairying techniques which stress sanitation and quality. The role of the milk inspector is not overlooked. In fact, Smith is glad for them, admitting that without them many farmers would be less responsive to high standards. Smith considers high standards to be very important if a viable milk market is to be kept.

Back in the days when 15 gallons of milk represented a day's production from an average shipper, rather than from one exceptional cow, the farmer took care of his

own milk deliveries. In Smith's case, milk was hauled 1½ miles by horse and buggy to a creamery at Shawsville. The cream was separated and churned into butter. Skim milk went back to the farmer to slop his hogs with. There wasn't much need for fluid whole milk. Smith says, since most every family had at least one cow. "Bossie" provided them with milk and butter in the freshest sense of the word.

The Smiths milked around 20 cows back in 1913 when automation hadn't yet reached the farm. Their daily production of 15 gallons compared well with other operations of that era, just as their present output of more than 500 gallons per day from 100 cows is significant by today's standards.

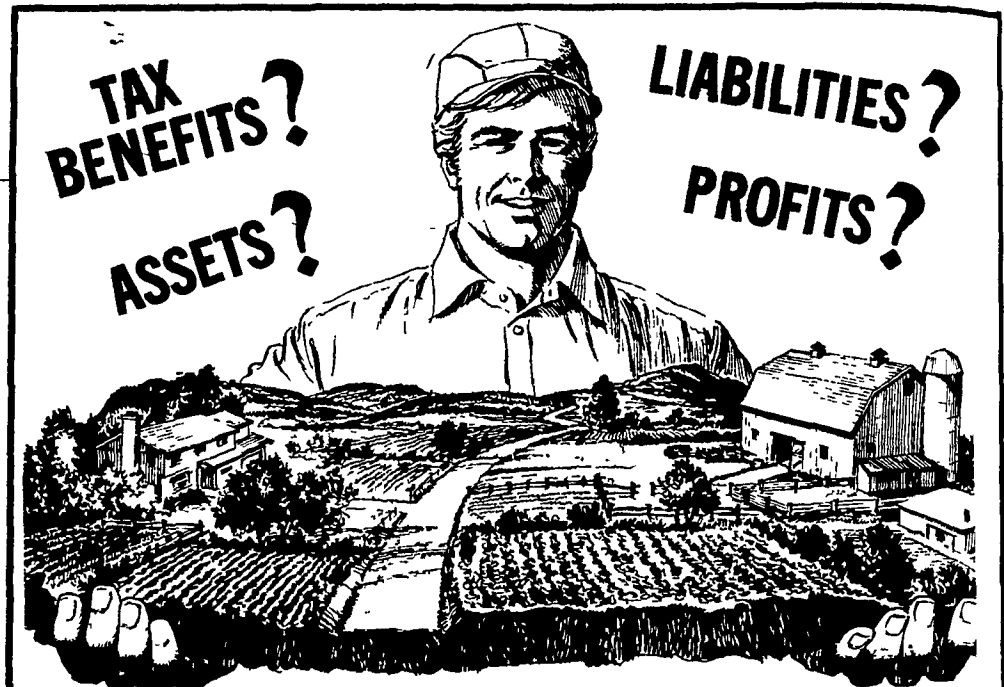
Milk was sold for about \$1.50 per hundredweight, Smith recollected. With no feed to buy and a diversified farming operation - including vegetables - providing their livelihood, they made out alright. Now the 180-acre farm is mainly in corn and hay. Although the elder Smith was the state's top tomato grower 30 years ago, that phase of the operation has been abandoned since all but two of Smith's eight children chose to specialize in the dairy business. (See related story elsewhere in this issue).

As innovations marched on, the old 5-gallon cans were replaced by 10-gallon cans, and instead of the farmer taking his own milk to town, trucks came around to pick them up. When weather didn't permit the trucks to come through, farmers again resorted to hauling their own goods. In Smith's case that usually meant hitching the team to a sleigh and transporting the milk to the nearest railroad depot which was seven miles away. Train service in those days was hourly, the old gentleman reminisced, adding that it wasn't entirely

done away with until Hurricane Agnes ruined the trackbed in June of 1972. Dairying, like everything else, is in a much different stage now than what it was

when Smith was a young man. He has since turned the farm over to his son, and a third generation stands waiting in the wings. They've all encountered

different experiences. Their common link in this much changed world of dairying is that all are interested in milking cows, and they look forward to a bright future.



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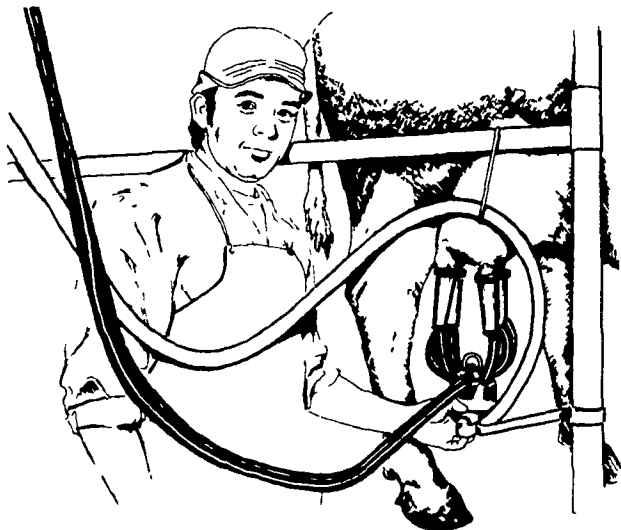
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