

# Where have all the dairy bulls gone?

By **JERRY WEBB**  
NEWARK, Del. — A catalog of changes that have taken place on America's farms over the last 40 years would have to include such notable progress as the adoption of hybrid corn, the disappearance of draft horses, the introduction of the combine and self-tieing baler, and a trend toward bigness.

Scientists point proudly to their work with fertilizers and pesticides, and the inventors and manufacturers beam over the mechanization and automation they have brought to agriculture. But if an agricultural Rip Van Winkle awoke after a 40-year snooze and looked around today's family farm, he'd understand most of what he would see. Tractors would be bigger and better, crops would be more productive. He might not fully understand a pipeline milker and he would miss the milk

cans. But he wouldn't be all that baffled until he was confronted with the problems of how cows have calves with no bulls around.

Think about it. Forty years ago, even 30 years ago, every farmer with a few head of dairy or beef animals kept a bull. Or if he didn't own enough animals to justify the expense of a bull, he relied on a neighbor who did have one. But the bulls are gone from most farms today, replaced by the advances of science.

The fiercest, largest old bull I ever saw belonged to one of my boyhood neighbors — a dairy farmer by the rather unusual name of Ray Finkbinder. He operated a Grade A dairy, which meant he produced and bottled milk right there on the farm and delivered it door-to-door in the nearby city. Milk was unpasteurized in those days and all that was added was what accidentally made its

way into the milk can through a strainer.

Ray had a fine herd of Guernsey cows so of course he kept an outstanding Guernsey bull. Maybe it was my age and size at the time that made that old bull seem so large and so mean — and maybe it was the large brass ring old Homer always wore in his nose. Or perhaps it was the electric fence strung around his small compound.

Each day on our walk to the one-room school, my brothers and I had to pass that pen — right next to the road, and sometimes Homer would be there right next to the fence snorting and pawing and acting very bullish. At first it was all we could do to keep from running past the pen when he was acting up. But then as time passed we grew used to the old fellow and we started to trust him and the electric fence that kept us apart.

Homer stayed in that pen year-round with nothing but

an overhanging tree for shade in the Summer and a shelter made of baled straw in the Winter. For years he lived what seemed to be a useful and happy life, never venturing outside that two-acre lot. On occasion he would have cow visitors and each morning and evening as we trudged past we would stop to say hello or to test our bravery by venturing under the electric fence and into the pen. It was a game of chicken — or maybe more appropriately, bull — where we would sneak into the pen far away from the bull and see how close we could get to him before the fear of being trampled or gored caused us to run for the safety of the electric fence. We had a lot of faith in that fence; it never occurred to us what might happen if in a fit of thrift old Finkbinder decided not to spring for the electricity needed to keep that fence hot.

Like so many good bulls of

that time Homer went off to become hamburger and was replaced by artificial breeding. That technological breakthrough gave dairy farmers everywhere access to the finest bulls in the country and did more to improve milk output than anything before or since. It also freed up some land and eliminated the hazards associated with keeping a bull.

Today huge breeding organizations keep the few outstanding bulls needed to breed most of the nation's dairy cows. Through science and a vast organization of technicians, the average dairyman is only a phone call away from the services of bulls that have proven their ability to sire top milk

producers. For a fee, a dairyman can introduce top bloodlines and steadily improve the genetic quality of his herd. Unlike the racehorse business, the dairyman spends only a few dollars for the services of a sire that might have cost many thousands — a sire that might have proven himself by producing hundreds of top milking cows.

The trend toward artificial breeding has been so complete that many of today's dairymen have never owned a mature bull and most city people don't even know what one looks like.

That's sort of strange when you consider that about half of the dairy calves born each year are bulls.



Some say a girl whose eyebrows meet will have a happy marriage.

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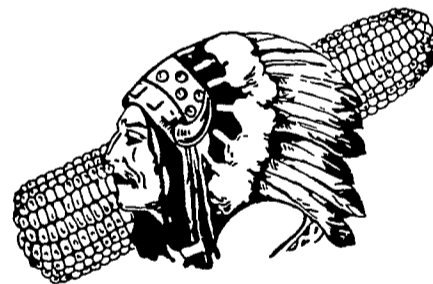
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