

Shenk's cup cheese

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Elsie recalls, "My mother put it in a colander with a cloth and weighted it down with a dish." She points out that egg cheese is most often eaten with molasses.

The Shenks also offer creamed cottage cheese and regular cottage cheese, but that is processed for them by Crowley's.

Elsie describes all their products as "typical Pennsylvania Dutch food." She says people who are used to eating their products want them mailed if they move away. Mail orders are accepted, but not during the hot summer months. Some visitors from far away have been known to purchase cheese in quantities and freeze it for later use to remind them of Lancaster County.

Bob and Elsie recognize the value of their product in this age of weight consciousness, and they capitalize upon it through radio and newspaper advertising. A "Dutch" girl is part of their logo, and they sometimes refer to cup cheese as "The Dutch Diet." Other appealing slogans include "A taste that doesn't go to waist," and "Have your Cheese and diet too," and "Eat up and slim down."

Another facet of Shenk's business is selling jams, jellies and relishes. Elsie explained that she began making preserves for sale when her children were young, around 1955.

She said, "I was too Scotch to throw away baby food jars." So she began spray painting the lids and processing jams and jellies to fill the jars. She soon was on her way to a booming business.

Today Shenks process and sell over 40 varieties of jams and jellies including the more ordinary apple

and pear butter to the more exotic gooseberry jam, ginger apple jelly, garden huckleberry jelly, quince jelly, crabapple jelly and many more. Watermelon rind, pickles and watermelon jelly are also part of their inventory.

Some of the produce comes from their garden. Elsie says, "We grow what we can, and when it is in season, we prepare it and freeze it. Then when we need it we make the jelly so its fresh." They also purchase some locally grown fruits.

She will try new varieties and combinations of fruits either at the suggestion of customers or the availability of produce. She says, "We find a home for what we have."

The garden which produces much of what they need is cared for regularly and enthusiastically by Cayton who is now 97 years old. He also peels melons when making watermelon pickles and other chores as needed.

Bob works at the plant full time along with Elsie's husband, Albert, and their nephew - Dale Shenk. Lois helps three days a week, and Elsie works part time at the plant and part time at market. She reserves two days a week for her homemaking tasks, although she can often be found at the plant on one of her homemaking days.

Shenks retail their cheese at Central and Southern Market in Lancaster, Meadowbrook in Leola, Eastern Market in York and later will stand at Garden Spot Market in Bridgeport.

They hire a lot of part time help to work at the various markets but Elsie goes to Meadowbrook each week because she enjoys it. She says, "I've done it since I was a kid

and I enjoy meeting people. You can get an education just from people. It gets to be a part of you and gets in the blood. It is a lot of work, but I'd rather be really busy.

"We have a lot of regular customers, but we also get those who don't know anything about the cheese. Explaining is par for the course. A little explanation can do an awful lot to help a sale. I present it in the best way possible. If you can't provide a service, you shouldn't go."

Shenk reflects on the work, which requires a lot of attention and a lot of hand labor. "It's a living, but it's not a get-rich-quick scheme. It's an honest living." He stated that there is not much

competition in the cup cheese business today, saying, "Years ago there was competition and then you could make a better product and people would buy your product."

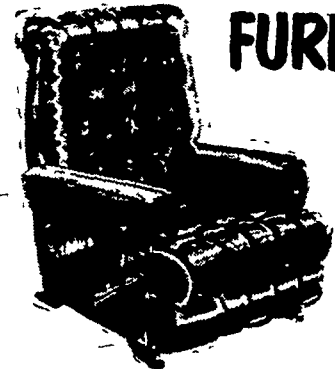
Bob Shenk and Elsie Graybill are carrying on a local tradition by providing the public with these delicious, wholesome dairy products. Dairy Month would be a good time to try one of these "Dutch treats" and experience a small part of the German heritage of the area.



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