

Chino Valley-over a quarter million cows

BY SALLY BAIR
Staff Correspondent

CHINO VALLEY, Cal. — There are no lush meadows, few green cornfields and no rolling hills. There are cows everywhere - not standing in picturesque meadows as in Lancaster County, but standing in long rows at feed troughs or in the dirt lots which are their homes. The place is the Chino Valley, where there is the largest concentration of dairy cows in the world. It is a sight which must be seen to be believed; to capture the true atmosphere on camera is impossible.

In 60 square miles there are 228,385 mature cows on 359 dairies, for an average of 636 cows per dairy. Indeed, printed information given to tour participants during the recent National Association of Animals Breeders' convention in California indicated that there are just two dairies in the area with fewer than 100 cows.

Since most of the dairy operations are located on 20-30 acres, they do not grow their own feed, and they do not raise their own replacements. Most replacement heifers are raised on specialized heifer ranches out of the local area. One tour guide from the area said that commercial heifer operations raise heifers for dairymen at the cost of \$1.35 per heifer per day.

Land prices in this unique valley average \$20,000 to \$30,000 per acre, or up to \$100,000 per acre for land with buildings for development purposes. The guide said we had driven past what is probably the last new dairy operation in the area because of the prohibitive prices.

The word "factory" comes to mind when one sees the operations with such large numbers of cows, but owners quickly change that feeling with their knowledge of cows and of the operation. Dairymen throughout the Valley

were worried during the time of this visit two weeks ago because they, too, were suffering unusual weather which was taking a toll not only in production but also in cow deaths.

The culprit was unusual humidity, something southern California is not accustomed to. One dairyman said that while temperatures of 105 degrees were tolerable, the humidity was not. Throughout the lots there were cows with necks extended, tongues out and panting in an effort to relieve their stress. There had been ten days of the unaccustomed humidity and there were several more before it was broken by some rain.

With land at a premium, only five percent of the feed used on these large dairies is grown locally. Some corn is produced locally, along with barley, oats, sudangrass and alfalfa, all used for green chop. Everything else is imported.

The basis of all feed rations is top quality alfalfa hay, and most of that is imported from the Imperial Valley, Palo Verde Valley, Antelope Valley and the southern San Joaquin Valley, although some is shipped from Utah and Arizona. Feed grains are shipped from other states.

By-product feeds also constitute a high percentage of the concentrate ration, and includes such things as fresh citrus pulp, almond hulls, whole cottonseed, cotton hulls, cottonseed meal, dried molasses beet pulp, and hominy. Piles of some of these products could be seen in the feeding areas of the lots.

If all of this sounds like a far cry from Pennsylvania's dairying operations, it truly is. With the mild climate, barns as we know them are almost non-existent. Animals are grouped in large lots with mounds of dirt to climb onto if it rains. Everywhere there are



This long row of dairy cows represents a typical feeding arrangement in the Chino Valley of California. These cows are part of the 700 cow milking herd of Bos Dairy, owned by Tony Bos and home of Bossir Holsteins. They are eating some of the most outstanding alfalfa hay in the country because of the ideal drying conditions there. To the left of the picture is pole barn filled with the hay which is an important part of their feeding program.

open sided pole-type barns used for shade cover and for stacks of hay. Some hay is stacked in the open, but most is covered with a roof.

When you're milking that many cows, a simple milking parlor will not do. Most of these dairies have a double-10 herringbone parlor, with automatic detachers, air-operated gates, wash pens and crowd gates and back flush systems.

Perhaps the most surprising feature is the landscape, which is simply rows and rows of cows in dirt lots. Farm homes are situated next to the main highway, separated from the cow lots by a fence, often less than five feet away. The homes are typical southern California style, often one story.

Temperatures in the Valley

rarely fall below freezing and rainfall is an average of 10 inches per year. Occasionally up to 35 inches may fall, but always in the spring and winter.

While it is true that a high percentage of many of these herds is made up of grade cows, there are many registered cows as well. Despite the numbers, individual cows are important.

The California dairymen who own these operations have many things in common with their Pennsylvania counterparts. Their herds also have mastitis problems, breeding concerns, and other health problems. While local farmers worry about heat detection, the California dairymen figure out ways to make artificial breeding work - and they are

successful.

There is a professional modern approach to all the problems, and it is not unusual for the herds to have a professional nutritionist in their employ. This is done not because it is interesting, or "nice" but because it is an economic necessity. There is little sentimentality - production is what keeps cows in a herd. And a quality product is what dairymen strive to produce.

The unique Chino Valley developed because of the huge population in southern California, just a few miles distant. The approach to dairying is very different from Pennsylvania methods, and a visit there is an eye-opener and learning experience for anyone.

Alta Dena produces certified raw milk

BY SALLY BAIR
Staff Correspondent

CHINO, Cal. — In an area which boasts huge cow numbers, Alta Dena Dairy stands alone. With 8,000 cows at five separate dairy operations, Alta Dena is the largest independently owned dairy facility in the nation.

Calling itself the "dairy that cares about your health," Alta Dena produces Certified Raw milk at four of the five dairy barns, the only one in California to do so, though 20 other dairies produce and sell raw milk.

Alta Dena is operated by the Stueve family, having been founded by the oldest three brothers of 17 children. Today 15 of

the 17 children are involved in the dairy and processing plants, with a total of 61 family members working.

The dairy began with 61 cows 38 years ago.

Because of the production of certified raw milk, extremely high levels of sanitation must be maintained. Paul Virgin, director of public relations and advertising, said that there must be a plate count of under 10,000 and less than 10 coliform. He added, "We are very conscious of quality of milk and often have a standard plate count of 50."

It takes some special measures to maintain such sanitation. Cows are washed from the floor and



This double 12 herringbone pit is part of the Alta Dena Dairy at Chino, California, where 8,000 cows are milked daily at five separate dairies. The Dairy produces Certified raw milk at four of the five dairies and requires the strictest sanitation methods. Notice the stack of cloth towels in front of the uniformed workers. Only cloth towels are used for preparing the udders prior to milking. The pit is in use nearly 24 hours a day, with two milking shifts and clean up between.

crowd gates ease their way into the milking parlors. Emphasizing the need to properly clean each cow, Virgin pointed out that the uniformed workers who do the milking use cloth towels to wash and dry the cows before milking. He added, "Paper towels are not absorbent enough."

Incidentally, it takes a lot of towels daily for the task, but there is a huge laundry on the premises to keep towels ready to use.

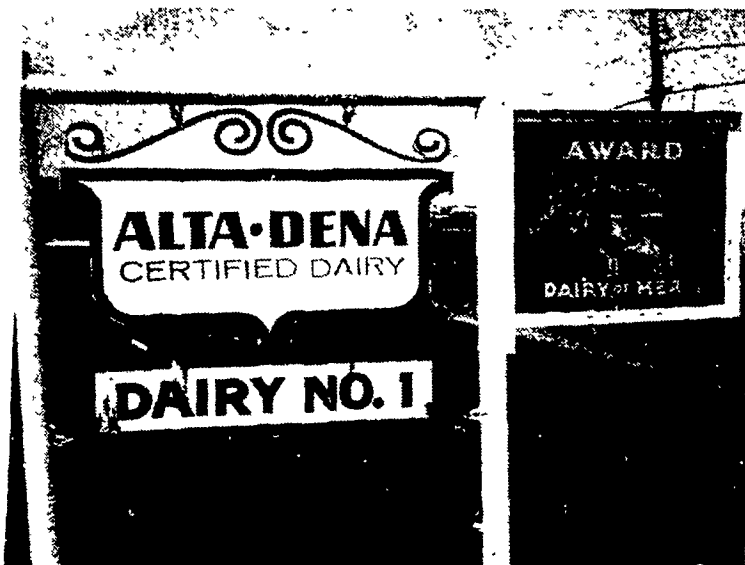
The parlors are in use 24 hours a day, with two crews for milking and clean-up crews in between.

Because of the Certified Raw milk, cows must be checked each month by a veterinarian, and are tuberculosis and brucellosis tested every six months. This dairy has 800 fulltime employees, plus 175 home delivery drivers and 175 tank truck drivers! Each employee, including the truck drivers must have regular physicals.

Virgin began working for the dairy when he was 15 years old, and is a great supporter of certified raw milk. He says the number of people using raw milk is increasing, adding, "One third of the world's population is allergic to milk, but they are only allergic to what they do to milk. They have pasteurized milk allergies."

While it costs more to produce the certified raw product, Virgin

(Turn to Page A31)



Alta Dena Dairy is the largest independently owned dairy complex in the nation, operated by the Stueve family, of which 61 members are involved. There are 8,000 cows milked daily at five separate but adjacent dairies in the Chino Valley. The dairy produces Certified raw milk at four of the five locations.