

Australian dairying is entirely grass to milk

BY ROBIN PHILLIPS
Staff Correspondent

STATE COLLEGE — Following an afternoon of management lectures by Penn State personnel at the Dairy Herd Management Conference last week, dairymen were entertained Thursday evening by guest speaker, Dr. Graeme Mein, world renowned research scientist from Australia.

Dr. Mein has traveled throughout the world researching the milking machine and mastitis. Scheduled to lecture on his findings the next morning, Mein enlightened the audience with the differences between dairying in Australia and the United States.

Australia consists of 10 to 15 coastal cities separated by millions of miles of arid country. The population density is about four people per square mile. There are approximately 20,000 dairy farmers concentrated in the two major dairy states of Victoria and Tasmania. Average herd size is 100 cows owned and managed by one family.

"It's very much a family operation," Mein stated about Australia's farms.

"Australia can produce milk products more cheaply than anyone else in the world, with maybe one exception." "We can do this by turning pastures into milk."

In Australia very little concentrated grain is fed. Herds

average 6,600 pounds of milk and 300 pounds of butterfat yearly. The basic price for manufactured milk is \$5.40 per hundredweight. Prices ranging from \$8.00 to \$10.00 per hundredweight are received if the dairy is supplying major cities and prime areas, but \$5.40 is the average price most dairymen receive.

Surplus pastures are harvested for silage and stored on open piles with cows feeding directly from the piles in fall and winter.

Mein also told farmers that there is less equipment used in their parlors and everything is kept as simple as possible. No weigh jars are used and the washing systems in the parlors use reverse flow cleaning. Over half the herds are milked in "walk thru dairies" and 80% of the new milking sheds being constructed are "eight to a side" herringbone setups. One man can milk 60 to 70 cows per hour.

The bigger dairies use a rotary system with two men milking 40 cows at a time. "It's an amazingly successful way to milk cows," Mein related. He also explained that the basic philosophy in Australia is, "for better or worse, you should be able to get done milking in an hour and a half."

Australians get no government subsidies. Subsidies were phased out several years ago, Mein said. "It's only what they can get out of

the market."

All cows calve in August and September and all go dry at the same time too. Calf raising is left to the wives and only five to ten percent of the dairy farmers need to employ outside labor.

"One of the worst features of living in Australia," Mein went on to say, "are flies." "It's one of our worst problems by far." Big fans are used in ceilings to move air and flies. Sprinklers are also utilized on roofs to cool the roof and milkers and reduce flies.

Although Mein stated that there was a four-year drought that broke last spring, mud is still a big problem during the rains. Rainfall averages 20 inches a year with a 44-inch evaporation rate. "It's a very hot, dry climate," Mein stated about the fall weather.

During this time, bush fires destroy farms and cows.

"Southeastern Australia is the most bush fire explosive area on earth," Mein stated. The "super dry air" causes fires to erupt anywhere. Hard to control, they often wipe out entire herds and dairies before they are controlled.

To the attending dairymen, Mein posed this question, "if we fed the way you do, would our cows produce like you're used to?"

He answered yes to this question and also stated that New Zealand

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Dr. Graeme Mein, world-renowned researcher on mastitis and the milking machine, addressed both the banquet and session of the Dairy Herd Management Conference at Penn State.

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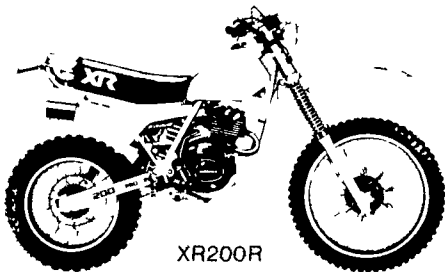
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