

Dairy Maids standards: It's gotta be perfect!

BY JOYCE BUPP
Staff Correspondent

FREDERICK, Md. — Joseph Vona has his own strict personal quality standards about milk.

"If it's not perfect, I won't take it."

Vona, and his sons James and Jody, own and operate Dairy Maid Dairy, Inc., a fluid milk bottling plant, marketing primarily through the Baltimore-Washington area.

He's been on the front lines of the phenomenal changes that have taken place in the dairy industry since he purchased the plant in 1945. Not that he had ever really intended getting into the industry in the first place.

An engineer by profession, Vona purchased what was then known in Frederick as Excelsior Sanitary Dairy, as a business investment. Excelsior processed and sold

between 1200 to 1500 gallons of milk daily, all locally produced and marketed primarily on routed served by five home delivery trucks.

But by 1947, the investment had developed into a full-blown "good family business." Vona began adding, changing, improving. And, he's never really stopped since.

"It seems like every six months we've expanded something," chuckles this industry innovator.

What's also changed, he adamantly adds, is the quality of milk coming off the dairy farm.

"There have been a lot of improvements in milk coming into the plant in recent years. Today's milk is the best ever - quality wise."

That rigid adherence to starting with the very best quality has resulted in a longer-than-normal dairy case life for Dairy Maid's

products, up to 12 days. That's based on continued checks by the state's health inspection programs, and attests to the dairy's strict quality standards.

Dairy Maid is wholly supplied by members of the Middle Atlantic Division of Dairymen, Inc. The cooperative provides testing and antibiotic screening for milk supplies, with Dairy Maid running its own quality grading as the shipments are unloaded.

Incoming milk can be held until needed in the plant's two 25,000 gallon storage silos. Processing five days a week as needs demand, milk goes from storage through separation while raw. Platelet pasteurization assures continued quality, with temperatures to 160 degrees, and a 5,000 gallon-per-hour capability. Homogenization and standardization processes further finish the product to consumer needs.

As the face of the dairy industry has changed, so has Dairy Maid's response to marketing trends. In place of the historic home delivery, with emphasis on frequent sales of quarts, today's customer picks up milk at a market, often by the gallon.

About 65 percent of Dairy Maid's fluid milk business is in the gallon size. Twenty percent of sales are accounted for by skim products, and about 30 percent for lowfat, as consumers gear their lifestyles toward health and weight consciousness.

Dairy Maid also handles large school milk volumes, serving five county school districts in the state. Between ten and fifteen percent of the firm's business is with the military.

Packaging equipment is in place

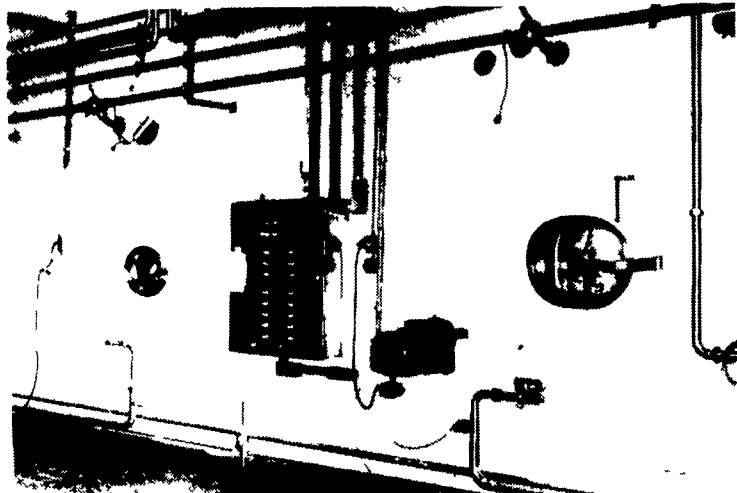
to meet the needs of this broad scope of customers. Filler machinery includes a standard size for handling half-gallon, quarts and pints. A gallon-size filler and one strictly for packaging bulk volume five-gallon containers serve other container needs.

To keep pace with their large

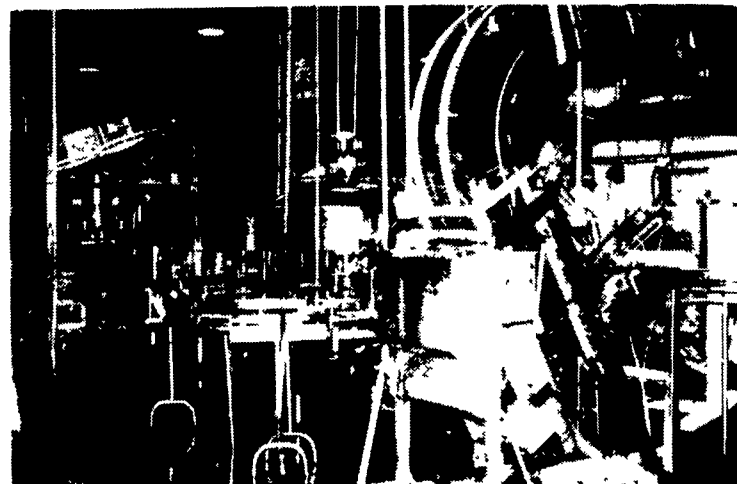
container utilization, the Vona's have integrated state-of-the-art blow mold technology, producing plastic gallon and half-gallon containers on site.

Natural gas and oil fuel the high technology needs of this modern dairy processing facility. Engineered to energy savings,

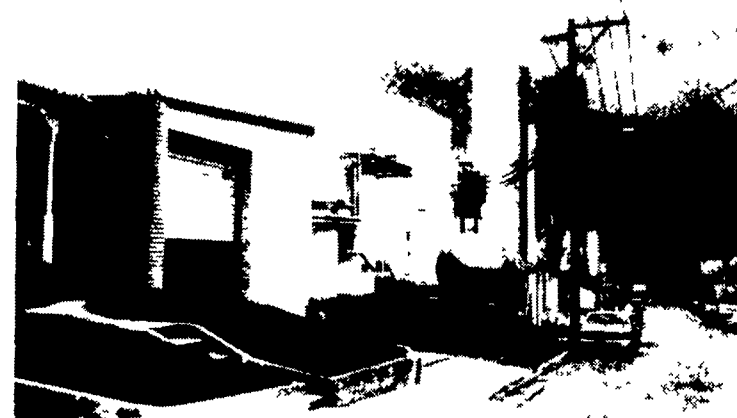
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Giant storage tanks line the walls of the plant, holding products as needed between the various processing steps. Tank readout gauges along the inside of the building make it easy for plant personnel to monitor the contents.



Automated filling equipment at Dairy Maid enables milk to be packaged in a variety of sizes, from school milk half-pints up to five-gallon bulk containers.



Dairy Maid Dairy, Inc., Frederick, Maryland, has grown from a 1500 gallon a day processor to a 40,000 gallon volume. It's owned and operated by the father-son team of Joseph Vona and his sons James and Jody.

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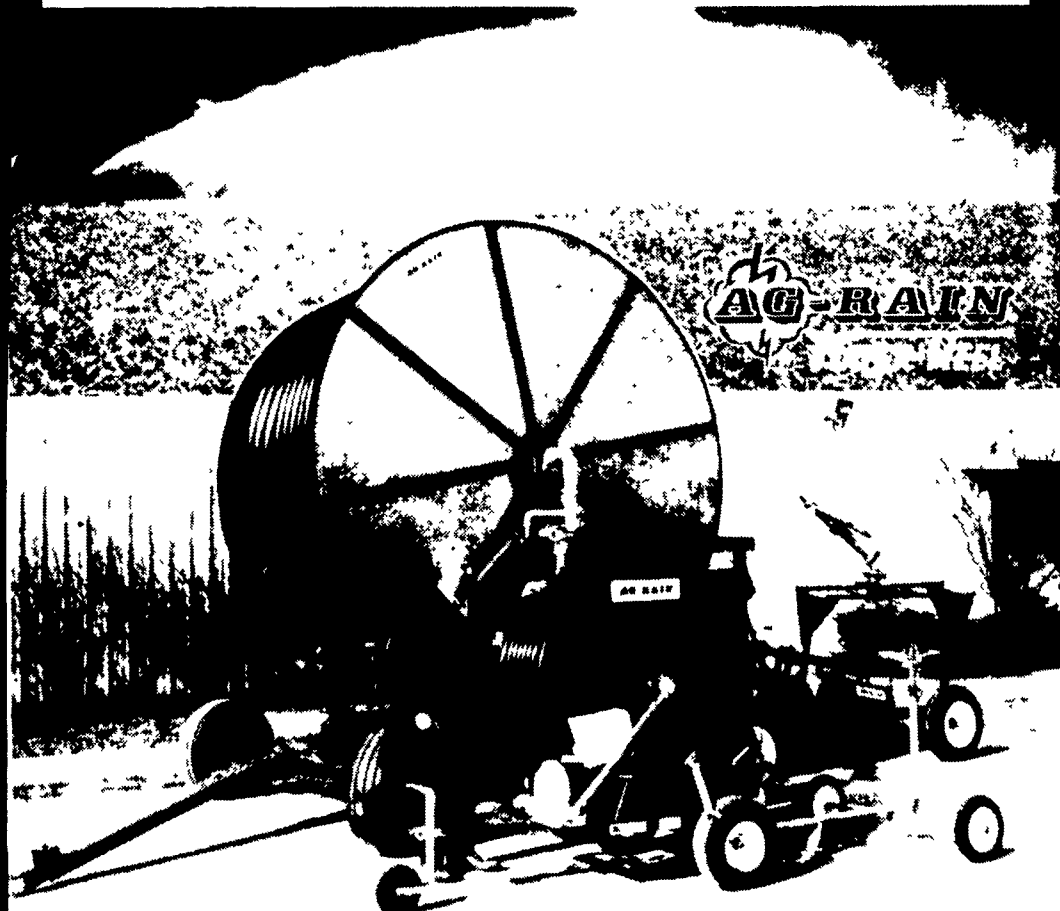
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