

# The Dairy Business

By  
Newton Bair

production is held just below the demand for the product, so you can set the price. Sell it to the kids, via Saturday morning TV.

Now, supposing that it could be done, would you get rich? Maybe someone would, but the competition would be fierce. Every farm would have its own factory, and the rush to corner the market is on.

Lower the price, cut a few corners, out-bid your neighbor for more land, borrow big bucks to expand, and you're soon growing bigger and better ulcers where they hurt the most.

So you see, this little flight of fantasy has taken us full circuit to about where we are right now. Except that the price of milk is set by the Federal Government. And the higher the price, the more we are tempted to produce, and the surplus grows. It is not a competitive price, since it is established by an artificial process that is self defeating. If it is based on the cost of production, there is a wide range of figures to choose from and argue about.

Even if we could establish a fair figure as the cost of producing milk, who would it be fair to? There are as many different "cost" figures as there are individual producers.

- Production from the 730,000 cows in Pennsylvania amounted to 9.42 billion pounds in 1984. Cash receipts from marketings of Pennsylvania milk totaled 1.3 billion dollars.

- With 21,000 dairy farms, Pennsylvania ranks fifth in the nation in total milk production, producing 7 percent of the nation's milk supply.

bottle! (It's not impossible you know, cornbrew is just illegal.)

But it's really milk we're talking about, not corn squeezin's. I doubt that there is any better way to manufacture the stuff than we now have. The biological factory inside a cow would be pretty hard to duplicate, and probably more expensive than it is worth. But isn't it a fascinating possibility nevertheless?

Start with the alfalfa crop. Harvest each cutting at the peak of nutrition, haul it to the nearest factory, grind it up, and stuff it into the Milk Machine. Add a few necessary ingredients like lysine, riboflavin, niacin, carotene and some corn starch, grind up a few special rocks that contain the right minerals, stir gently for a few hours at 100 degrees Fahrenheit, and Presto! A lovely white liquid comes pouring out the other end. (I haven't figured out how to make it come out white, but someone will.)

The machine would last forever, with occasional lubrication, and you are the master in complete control.

The residue can be made into breakfast cereal and sold for \$2.39 a pound. Everything is completely predictable. Costs are controlled,

Getting the milk from the cow's udder to the breakfast table just takes too many steps. The obvious first step is the one that occupies most of our attention - from the cow to the bulk tank.

Even that first step in the long process takes a lot of preparation, as you well know. And a lot of investment in time and capital.

Once it was a hand job, requiring no more tools than a dented bucket, a wooden stool, two deft hands and a lot of patience. The capital investment was zilch. Even the animals themselves could be had for a few services from the neighbors ole' bull. There was butter on the table, and a little change in the crock.

Well, we have come a long way in modernizing and mechanizing the cow. No more family-cow herds like Grandpa had. It takes a hundred or more to support our modern living habits. And a lot of mechanization, without which most of us wouldn't even consider milking cows.

Sometimes I think it's the machinery we like, instead of the cows. Maybe we should devise a way to manufacture milk without the inconvenience of that contrary and costly biological critter. Go directly from the cornfield to the

And even if the support price gets as low as \$7.00 a hundred, there will still be a few producers that will pay their bills and live a good life while the rest of us go bankrupt. They will be astute business managers, who use techniques adapted to the present. Not the worn out principles of the

past 40 years. Like the one that dictates borrowing your way to success.

Borrowing, expanding and mechanizing might produce more milk more efficiently, but who will buy it and use it? Maybe the cart is trying to push the horse. Or the machinery is too fast for the cow.

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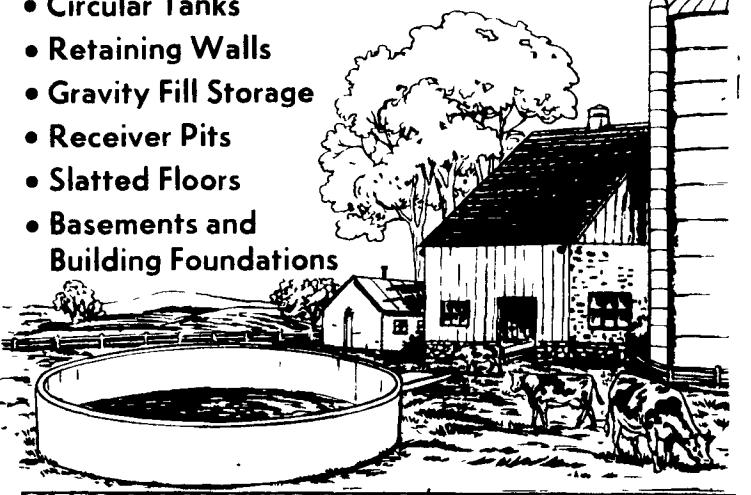
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