

Ireland, U.S. Dairy Industries Comp

Editor Note:

During April, the American Dairy Association and Dairy Council sponsored a dairy tour of Ireland where we visited dairy farms and processing plants to understand better the Irish dairy industry and to compare their methods with ours.

Here's Part 1 of a comprehensive article about the comparisons of production, processing and promotion between the Irish and the United States dairy industries.

WILLIAMSPORT (Lycoming Co.) — The American Dairy Association and Dairy Council (ADADC) sponsored an eight-day tour of the Republic of Ireland from April 8-16. The 28-member tour group included dairy farmers and industry representatives from the states of New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania. Through a combination of plant tours and farm visits, the group was able to compare Irish dairy production, processing and promotion methods with those of the United States. On their first day in Ireland, the visiting Americans were greeted by the U.S. Ambassador to Ireland, Margaret Heckler, who told them, "Ireland is a country with a glorious history and a young population—about half are under 26 years of age."

Known as the "Emerald Isle" because of the mild, damp climate that encourages growth almost year round, Ireland has about the same area as South Carolina. There are four provinces and 32 counties, six of which are known as Northern Ireland. The other 26 counties form the Republic of Ireland with a population of about 3½ million.

Agriculture is a major industry, contributing 10% to the Gross National Product and 25% of total exports, including live animals and beverages. About 162,000 are employed in farms, plus 43,000 in related industries.

Production By Quota

Through visits with Irish dairy farmers, cooperative leaders, dairy processors and promotion executives, tour members learned that Irish production levels are highly restricted under the European Community (EC) quota system which just completed its fifth year on March 31. Production above allowable quotas is assessed a penalty called a "Super Levy." This year's national Super Levy is about 10 million Irish pounds (\$15 million). Some Irish farmers have had their milk checks withheld since the first of the year to cover their portion of the Super Levy. A few larger farmers are expected to pay several thousand pounds. If farmers had not been feeding milk to their calves and other livestock since Christmas, plus having had a very wet March, the quota overages would have been even higher.

Irish production is highly seasonal with 14% more milk produced in June as in January because of the nine-to-ten-month pasturing season, with very little concentrate needed. Irish cows average 8,500 lbs. milk production compared to 13,750 lbs. production in the U.S., but Irish farmers' feeding costs are minimal. In Munster, Ireland's largest dairy province, farmers may only feed a half ton per cow all year. Because of the damp weather, they do not raise alfalfa, corn or soybeans; they raise grasses. Efficient use of grasslands is the key to profitable

dairy farming under a quota system. The average farm milks 23 cows on 55 acres. The group visited a dairy research farm and three other dairy farms, one of which is also a farmhouse cheese operation.

The Agriculture Institute, established in 1958 with grant money from the U.S., conducts research in all aspects of Irish agriculture at seven research stations, one of which is Moorepark Research station devoted to dairy and pigs.

Their primary goal over the past thirty years has been the development of a low-cost, high-output dairying system, styled after New Zealand's dairy industry. Research included determination of stock-carrying capacity of Irish grassland per cow (from 3 acres/cow to 1.2 acres/cow) and increasing profitability of milk production from Irish grassland by nitrogen use and white clover. Research continues in cost-efficient feeding to encourage more winter lactation. Other successful husbandry research projects are earlier breeding of heifers and improved health and hygiene practices. They also compare milking systems.

Product research has included UHT (ultra-high temperature) products, high protein products and butter quality research, including development of a more spreadable butter by feeding a whole soybean feed. Consumer costs are anticipated to be 12 cents/lb. higher than regular butter. In general, like their U.S. counterpart, Dairy Research Inc. (DRINC), Moorepark Researchers concentrate on process development rather than product development.

One of the farm visits was to the Walshe Family farm, owned by the president of the Young Farmers Association (Macra na Feirme) Padraic Walshe, and his parents. Their 75-acre farm has a quota of 55,000 gallons plus a leased 45-acre farm and attached 14,000 gallons quota. They milk 64 cows,



Seamus O'Grady (left), Irish dairy farmer hosted Ida and Allen Risser, Leola, on a tour of his 150-acre farm in County Tipperary. O'Grady milks 80 cows, while the average Irish dairy farmer milks 23 cows on 55 acres. The Risser, (Ida writes for Lancaster Farming), were among 28 dairy farmers and industry representatives from Pennsylvania, New York and New Jersey who toured dairy farms and processing plants on the third annual spring dairy tour sponsored by the American Dairy Association and Dairy Council.

large for an Irish farm, and also raise beef (64 animals and 47 calves) plus 17 replacement heifers.

They ship their milk to the nearest large cooperative, Avonmore, and get the equivalent of \$14.70/cwt. Some farmers may get as much as three to four dollars/cwt. more based on premiums for seasonality and other factors. This year, the Walshes fed as much as possible to their calves and pigs but still went over quota. They are not sure how much over quota they went because there is a pool of milk from those who were under quota called "flexi-milk" which may offset a portion of the Super Levy they will have to pay.

Another farm visited by the group was the Seamus O'Grady farm, in the heart of County Tipperary. He milks 80 cows on 150 acres with a quota of 76,000 gallons. Production last year was 11,680 lbs./cow with 3.72% average butterfat. He gets \$15.10/cwt. from the Thurles Cooperative two miles away. He milks in a 10-unit herringbone milking parlour. He has 70 weanlings overwintered on silage and 70 calves reared on whole milk. Machinery includes a John Deere tractor, a silage grab, fertilizer spreader and slurry tanker. Two years ago his farm won an award for quality of milk, regularity of supply, yields, and good management.

The Thurles Cooperative where he ships milk paid as high as \$21/cwt. for winter milk. They are a small but profitable 30-year-old cooperative with 200 members, 100 active. They make two-thirds of their money on fluid milk, one-third on supplies—feed, fencing, chemicals, etc. They market their fluid milk in a 20-mile radius of the plant.

Processing For Export

Dairy processing in Ireland is geared primarily to export as only about 30% of their production is processed for home use. About two-thirds of dairy exports are casein and caseinate (\$300,000,000) especially to the

