

Dairy Industry Vital

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With the close of the Cornwall mines following the 1972 Hurricane Agnes flood, and the later folding of the Bethlehem Steel foundry and the folding or great downscaling of several other metal-manufacturing businesses, the importance of agriculture became more and more apparent to the community.

However, its importance was again overshadowed before the agricultural community got the recognition it long deserved — with fuel prices relatively inexpensive, those working in higher income areas surrounding the Lebanon Valley came looking for homes.

Lebanon County offered an area with a post-card rural landscape, close proximity to recreational areas, low crime rates and less violent crimes, close access to interstate transportation routes, good reputation schools, low taxes, adequate infrastructure, etc.

Again farming lost out to general public appreciation. The good paying jobs were with construction — large residential and commercial retail projects outbid farmers in search of land.

Increased pressure on limited available water, sewer, traffic, and recreational sites, plus the recession of the late 1980's, caused a subsequent drop off in the construction business.

And through it all, the county's dairy and agriculture industries have not only survived, but they've been prevailing.

The evidence is strong how important the dairy industry is to the Lebanon Valley.

The Dairy Queen East, located along Route 422, east of Lebanon city, is one of the busiest franchise locations in the United States, according to its owner, Ben Shankroff.

According to Shankroff, there is not specific way to know if local milk is used in the manufacture of the products her sells. He said there are two approved-by-DQ suppliers and he uses one.

However, he said it would take 50,000 cows just to supply the dairy ingredients for DQ cones and shakes.

And there are a lot more dairy products that are made and sold by DQ.

Within the past two weeks, the Lebanon DQ has introduced three new flavors of the product, "Blizzard."

Shankroff described the "Blizzard" as a combination of their soft serve (they don't advertise "ice cream" because soft serve is 5 percent fat and in order to qualify as ice cream, the frozen product has to contain at least 10 percent butterfat.) and different desert products, such as candy, cookies or cake.

The three new flavors are Rocky Road, Mud Pie, and Chocolate Chip Cookie Dough. Kenneth Winebark, livestock agent for the Lebanon County Extension Service, said both products are good. He said his son prefers the Mud Pie, while Ken said he prefers the cookie dough recipe.

The DQ East in Lebanon is closed during January for

maintenance, but is open the rest of the year. Without the benefit of being able to serve hot foods.

However, demand for dairy products is strong enough that Shankroff went with the newest designed DQ building offered when he rebuilt the business two years ago.

Shankroff took over the business in 1975, but the franchise has been a popular place since it first went into business in 1952.

In some of their products, DQ uses some of Hershey Chocolate Co. products.

Hershey is a key name to the Lebanon dairy market. More than 60 of the 310 dairy farms in the county ship to

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Good Samaritan Hospital's Sandra Goodman, food production manager supervisor, shows some of the cream-styled soups the hospital makes with local dairy products. Goodman said local dairy products are very important to the quality of food the hospital is able to offer patients.

