

# Milk Tester Recounts Long, Productive Career

**DAVE LEFEVER**  
Lancaster Farming Staff

LANCASTER (Lancaster Co.) — What job requires waking up earlier than a dairy farmer in the morning? Jay Risser knows the answer — he lived it for 50 years.

"To a certain extent, I was sleep-deprived," Risser said of his career as a milk tester with the Pennsylvania Dairy Herd Improvement Association (DHIA).

"You've got to make up your mind, if you do this job, you're going to have to get up early and

keep ungodly hours."

Risser retired this past April, after a half century of rising at 3 a.m. to help dairy farmers make better management decisions.

Milk testing, like dairy farming, has seen enormous change during Risser's tenure. Since he first went to work, DHIA evolved from a simple, hands-on milk and feed cost analysis to a high-tech service that offers a wide gamut of herd improvement tools.

Risser grew up on a diversified livestock and produce farm between Lancaster and Lampeter. His start as a milk tester came in the early 1950s during the Korean War, when the young Risser chose to join the alternative service because of his beliefs as a conscientious objector to war.

The decision took him to Washington County in western Pennsylvania, where he carried out his two-year assignment testing milk on dairy farms. The logistics of the job were a lot different than they are for milk testers today.

"We'd arrive at the farm in the



Risser demonstrates the centrifuge that he used to perform butterfat tests in the early years of his career as a milk tester.



The newer milking sampling containers, left, are a big improvement over the old "Whirl Paks," Risser said.

evening and stay overnight," Risser said. "(The farm family) would give us three meals." During his first year in Washington County, Risser was even treated to a special feast the week before Thanksgiving — from a dairy family concerned about his holiday plans.

"They asked me if I was going to make it home for Thanksgiving," he said. "When I told them I didn't think I would, they asked me in for lunch and served a full-course turkey dinner."

During a typical farm visit, Risser would collect milk samples from each cow for the evening and morning milkings, meter and record milk production, test for butterfat, and calculate feed costs.

He would finish the whole job, including a complete, hand-

written report, before leaving the farm.

Risser's work garnered appreciation and respect from the farmers in Washington County.

"When I left there, a Jersey breeder said, 'We were glad to have you, Jay. We needed you more than the army did,'" Risser recalled.


On his return to Lancaster County, Risser decided to continue working for the DHIA. In the beginning, he tested milk for farmers in the Ephrata area, then made a shift toward the Penn Manor area in the western part of the county.

"I saw that there were large herds in that area and I decided to move in that direction," he said. Risser spent a large part of his career testing for farmers in

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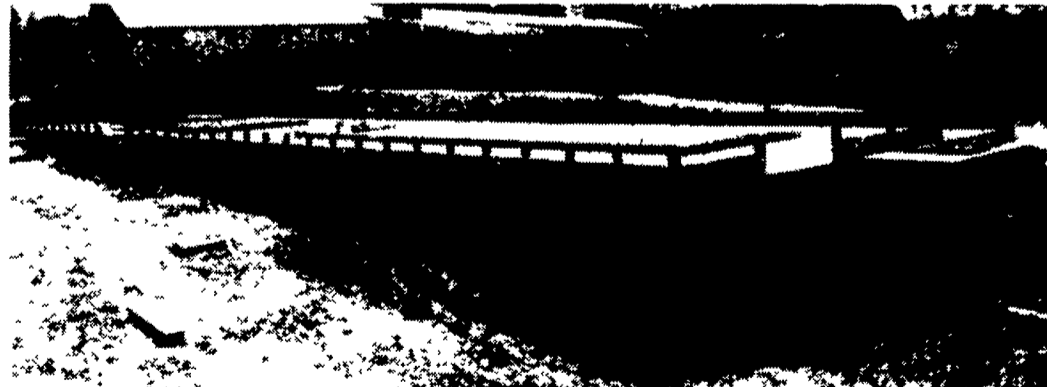
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