

BRIGHTON AREA FARMERS: FROM BEEF TO DAIRY c. 1960 (CONCLUDED)

DEPENDING ON THE NUMBER OF MILKING COWS IN A HERD AT A GIVEN TIME, A STAINLESS STEEL TANKER IS DRIVEN TO THE DAIRY FARM EACH 24-48 HOURS AND, AFTER TESTING FOR PURITY, DRAWS OFF THE MILK WHICH HAS BEEN ACCUMULATED BY THE FARMER. THESE TANKERS, RANGING IN SIZE FROM 15,000 TO 20,000 GALLONS (8.8# PER GALLON), TRANSPORT THE MILK TO A DISTANT MILK PROCESSING FACILITY. MUCH OF THE MILK PRODUCED IN THE COUNTY IS DELIVERED TO THE MICHIGAN MILK DEPOT IN PLYMOUTH.

IT IS OBVIOUS MANY CHANGES HAVE TAKEN PLACE IN THE FARMING BUSINESS IN THE COUNTY. IN 1967 THERE WERE 284 DAIRY FARMERS, BY 1971, 191. IN 1994 THAT TOTAL IS DOWN TO 32. ALREADY IN 1967 THERE WERE NO DAIRY FARMS IN GREEN OAK AND BRIGHTON TOWNSHIPS. MOST DAIRY FARMS ARE NOW FOUND IN THE NORTHERN TIER OF TOWNSHIPS. HERD SIZE HAS ALSO CHANGED. RANGING FROM 20-500 HEAD THEY AVERAGE 96 HEAD OF CATTLE - UP FROM AN AVERAGE OF 30 IN 1960. THE NEED OF COSTLY EQUIPMENT IS THERE WHETHER FOR 30, 60 OR 100. SIMPLE ECONOMICS DECREES THAT THE MORE CATTLE THE LOWER THE UNIT COST. THE CAPITAL INVESTMENT INVOLVED IN STARTING ANY FARMING BUSINESS PRECLUDES ALL BUT THOSE WHO ARE BEQUEATHED A FARM BY PARENTS. AS MORE PEOPLE MOVE INTO THE AREA THE FARMER FINDS HIS LAND ASSESSED AT HIGHER RATES. MOST FIND IT FINANCIALLY UNFEASIBLE TO CONTINUE.

PERHAPS TO ENSURE THAT A FARMER'S LIFE IS NOT WITHOUT A FEW DISTURBING FEATURES, MOTHER NATURE STIRS THE POT. ONE SUCH TIME WAS MARCH, 1973. A SEVERE SNOW STORM CLOSED ROADS FOR DAYS AND CAUSED SOME TO LOSE ELECTRICAL POWER. UNLESS ONE HAD A GENERATOR HANDY, THIS WAS A DOUBLE WHAMMY. WITHOUT ELECTRICITY COWS HAD TO BE MILKED BY HAND (THEY MUST BE MILKED REGULARLY); DOZENS OF THEM. HOWEVER, AFTER ALL THAT WORK, THE MILK HAD TO BE DUMPED FOR SEVERAL DAYS UNTIL THE TANKER COULD GET THROUGH TO PICK IT UP. NCR COULD THE MILK BE PROPERLY COOLED OR PUMPED FROM THE BULK TANK TO THE MILK TRUCK. EVEN THOSE WHO HAD POWER TO CONTINUE NORMAL MILKINGS (2-3 TIMES DAILY) ALSO HAD TO DUMP SEVERAL MILKINGS DOWN THE DRAIN BECAUSE OF THE SNOW BLOCKED ROADS.

ON THE LIGHTER SIDE; THE STORY IS TOLD OF THE OLD FARMER WHO HOARDED HIS MILK CHECKS, NOT CASHING THEM FOR SEVERAL MONTHS. THIS BOTHERED THE BOOKKEEPER AT THE MILK FACTORY WHEN HE BALANCED HIS ACCOUNTS, BUT THE FARMER WOULDN'T RESPOND TO HIS APPEALS. A NEIGHBOR HEARD ABOUT IT AND TOLD THE BOOKKEEPER HE COULD GET HIM TO CASH THEM BECAUSE THE FARMER LISTENED IN ON THE PARTY TELEPHONE LINE. THAT NEIGHBOR AND ANOTHER FEIGNED A CONVERSATION. "HAVE YOU CASHED YOUR MILK CHECK YET?" "No." "YOU BETTER NOT WASTE TIME, BECAUSE I HEARD IN TOWN THAT THE FACTORY MIGHT NOT HAVE THE MONEY IN THE BANK FOR ALL THE CHECKS." THE OLD FARMER WAS WAITING AT THE BANK DOOR BEFORE IT OPENED THE NEXT MORNING. (COMPILED FROM: "MICHIGAN MEMORABILIA" BY BILL PLESS; "PRACTICAL HOME VETERINARIAN, 1913, DAVID ROBERTS, DVS; INTERVIEWS WITH MARY TAYLOR, CLARENCE TAYLOR, A.J. SOUTHWELL, ALICE NEWCOMB, FRED CATRELL AND JOHN LEECH, COUNTY AGRICULTURAL AGENT. ALSO NEWSPAPER ARTICLES BY ANDREW AND CLAUDINE JACKSON AND DUANE GIRBACH.)

BRIGHTON AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
P.O. Box 481
BRIGHTON, MI 48116-0481