

A Review of the Dairy Industry of Trinidad

The war has brought many changes in the dairy industry of Trinidad since Mc William (1940) carried out his survey. It is estimated that the cost of production has risen about 300% since pre-war days. The main item of this large increase, is the wages bill. The increase in daily pay for a dairy worker has been to about three times his pre-war wage (Mc William 1945), and in addition he now has benefits such as holidays with pay, and time and a half paid for Sundays and public holidays. This higher paid worker is not generally as efficient as his pre-war counterpart.

The tyre shortage has caused a great increase in transport costs, the wartime milk bottle has only about 1/12. the life of a pre-war bottle, and the cost of concentrates has risen from 3¢ per lb. to 4½¢ per lb. all these are contributing to this increase in the cost of production. To compensate, the retail price of milk has risen from 44¢ (1937) to \$1.20 per gallon (1944), but in spite of this a number of producers have had to give up business.

There is only one large commercial dairy in the island (referred to as dairy A) producing about 125 gallons a day, which is retailed in Port of Spain after pasteurization (plant referred to as plant A). The government maintain a dairy (referred to as dairy B) to supply school children and public institutions, also two sugar companies produce milk for consumption by their staff (referred to as dairies C and D).

At the other end of the scale is the East Indian with about one to six cows producing milk under most insanitary conditions. The manager of dairy A, which purchased milk from these Indians, expressed the opinion that the milk of certain of these producers was of such poor quality that they were far more trouble than the return was worth, and it was only on account of the acute milk shortage in Port of Spain he dealt with them at all. The owner of another dairy (E) emphatically refused to deal with them, even at the cost of losing customers. This group has a common custom of retailing milk in rum bottles and hence the yield of their cows is referred to as "X" bottles, where 6 make an imperial gallon. The number refers to the yield on the day of calving (Mc William 1940). Certain of the rum bottles the writer observed, were in a most unhygienic condition.

Between these two groups are dairies like Studley Park in Tobago, and Tobago dairy in St. Augustine, where herds of about 20 cows under the immediate supervision of the owner are run to cater for the demands of a nearby residential area such as Scarborough or St. Augustine. (Dairy E is one of this class). This group appears worst hit by wartime conditions and a large number of these producers have given up business.

In Trinidad the liquid milk trade has to face the competition of dried whole milk, which is not only equally cheap, but extremely simple to reconstitute without giving a lumpy constituency, can be prepared quickly as required, stores well, and is more hygienic than most raw milks.

The future of dairy farming in Trinidad seems to lie in the production of a safe, clean, cheap product.

It would be more satisfactory if a differential scale of payment could be introduced, as it is most unfair that a producer going to the extra trouble and cost of producing a clean product and pasteurizing it, should receive the same price as a low grade producer whose milk may be a menace to the health of the consumer. Compulsory pasteurization would be a progressive step, though this would penalize those producers whose raw milk is of a higher quality than certain of the pasteurized milks retailed. A lot of milk consumed is boiled first as a safety measure, which indicates the suspicion with which a lot of raw milk is treated.

Harrison (1941) gave the number of mature dairy cows in Trinidad as less than 12,000 with 2,000 of these as satisfactory producers. He also pointed out the gross deficiency of the liquid milk production in relationship to the demand, equivalent to 7,600 gallons per day.