

Chapter 1 Overview of Milk Delivery and Otero County Dairies

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Throughout the early period of the history of the United States, the largest segment of the population was agrarian based. In fact, it was not until 1920 that 50% of the US population lived in urban rather than rural settings. Since that vast majority lived in a rural or semi-rural setting, almost every family had its own milk cow. Obtaining milk was simple although *very* regular – cows want to be milked twice daily.

When settlements grew large enough to develop more specialization, those people with non-agrarian jobs bartered with their neighbors for milk (see Rawlinson 1970:3). With continued growth, some farmers ran a few extra milk cows, and the dairy industry was born. When Tularosa and La Luz became the first non-native settlements in the Tularosa Basin in the early 1860s, most families probably had their own milk cows and traded extra milk to their few neighbors who did not.

Even when dairies became more specialized, they were often sidelines for farming or ranching operations or, at the very least, used other sources to augment their income from milk sales. Many Otero County dairies advertised other economic offerings such as sales of firewood, eggs, or vegetables and frequently only advertised in the spring/summer months when hotter weather created a likely increase in sales. The earliest farmers who specialized in dairy products only delivered their milk to local customers, usually very few in number. The combined lack of packaging and poor refrigeration contributed to this localization.

The area seemed to be well suited for dairy herds. The *Alamogordo News* bragged that “The Sacramento mountains have been pronounced to be a peerless dairying section by men who are versed in the situation and the requirements for commercial dairying” (October 6, 1921). They also noted that “there were considerable latent resources in this line in the Tularosa and La Luz sections” as well as “portions of the flats.” Since dairies blossomed in almost all sections of the county, the bragging of the *News* may have been accurate.

Ice and Packaging

Ice was available in Alamogordo a year before Otero County was created. George Carl had transported ice manufacturing equipment by ox team from Colorado prior to the arrival of the railroad. When passengers debarked from the first train to arrive in the new town on June 15, 1898, George Carl's ice was served to them (Spearman 1999:7). Use of ice during delivery by wagon was a common practice in some parts of the country. Charles J. Wieland recalled the difficulties as a wagon driver in Chicago, "especially in the summer when the milk had to be packed in ice and there was a constant struggle to keep his clothing clean and dry" (*The Milk Route* 1999a:1). However, delivery of iced milk by wagon may have been impractical in most of rural 19th century Otero County due to sheer distance between even close neighbors and distance from the ice plant.



Figure 1-1 - Milk Delivery Wagon ca. 1900 (Courtesy Cliff McDonald)

Packaging, too, presented a problem. Prior to the invention of the milk bottle, milk was delivered by the dairymen in large cans (usually 10 or 20 gallon) or crocks (Figure 1-1). When the dairyman's wagon rolled to a stop in front of a customer's home, the housewife would bring her pail or pitcher to the wagon to be filled by a dipper from the dairyman's can or crock. This procedure was extremely unsanitary, allowing dust and organisms to enter the dairyman's can at each opening (Rawlinson 1970:3; Tutton 1997:6). The earliest recorded dairy in what became Otero County, Barrett's Jersey Dairy (established 1889), undoubtedly delivered milk in this manner (*Weekly Cloudcrofter* June 25, 1915).

Sanitation

One issue that each municipality had to confront was where a dairy could be located. The issue of the *Silver Lining* that followed Cloudcroft Dairy's last ad addressed "The Dairy Question." "All the prominent citizens of Cloudcroft" gathered to discuss the problems involved

with the operation of dairies within the Cloudcroft city limits.¹ After a long and sometimes heated discussion, the consensus was that dairies could be operated inside the town limits if “the business was conducted properly and everything pertaining to it was kept clean, and was not a nuisance to others.” The meeting warned, however, that “anyone starting a dairy and not keeping the premises [*sic*] clean should on complaint be deemed keeping a nuisance and be fined every day that said nuisance exists, and until [*sic*] same be abated” (*Cloudcroft Silver Lining* July 1, 1905).

During the early 20th century, people were beginning to worry about cleanliness and disease to a greater extent than in the past. On June 30, 1906, President Theodore Roosevelt signed into law the Food and Drugs Act of 1906 (Richardson 1979:10-12). Although the act was primarily aimed at labeling, the basic cause of the legislation was a desire to improve the quality of food and medicine.

Tuberculosis was becoming a major concern. Along with other vectors, physicians had discovered that the disease was spread to humans by cattle. Across the country, state and local governments were taking precautions to stop contamination. New Mexico passed a bill in 1909 to deal with the problem:

The last legislature passed Council Bill No. 34, which provides for the suppression of contagion and infectious diseases among cattle and horses and for the extirpation of such diseases. . . . During the winter all dairy cattle in towns having a population of 500 or more inhabitants, and all dairy cattle from which products are sold in such towns, will be tested for tuberculosis. . . . Animals which are found to be tuberculous will be condemned and destroyed and the owner paid for such animals on a basis provided for in the law (*Tularosa Valley Tribune* December 4, 1909).

Although the tuberculosis worry passed, a new concern arose in November 1927. When the New Mexico Bureau of Public Health inspected 43 samples of milk at Alamogordo, it discovered that many of them were dirty and had too high a bacteria count. Seven months later,

¹ “All prominent citizens” included: T.A. Haxby, C.M. Powell, Prof. Helm, Major Long, H.M. Den, Parry Kearney, Sr., W.E. Mathews, as well as others.

Paul Fox from the Bureau repeated the tests and announced that the Alamogordo dairies had made a good recovery. The *News* crowed that “nearly everyone who sells milk is trying to do the right thing” (*Alamogordo News* May 24, 1928).

Other Milk Alternatives

Although evaporated milk was sold in Alamogordo, it was little advertised and probably furnished scant competition to the dairymen offering the fresh product. In 1917, however, Widemann’s Pure Evaporated Goat Milk was advertised as “highly recommended by prominent physicians for tuberculosis” (*Otero County News* September 6, 1917). Goat’s milk, which had been available in the late 1880s in Northern New Mexico, made a brief come-back in Alamogordo in the early 20th century. Although the Life Saver Goat Dairy opened up briefly on 9th Street in the early 1930s, it was clear that Alamogordo residents preferred cow’s milk.

Delivery Vehicles

Even though the first use of a motor vehicle for the transportation of milk (from New York City processing plants to wholesalers) occurred in 1913 (Rawlinson 1970:9.), it is probable that delivery in Otero County continued to be by horse-drawn conveyance. I have found no specific reference to the use of either horse-drawn or motorized transportation, but it is likely that the horse continued to be used for milk delivery until at least the 1920s, if not later. It is also possible that the earliest motorized milk delivery in the area was conducted from a pickup truck.² The McMurry brothers of City Dairy added refrigerated trucks in 1953 and delivered frozen foods to Ruidoso.

Refrigerated trucks were in use by at least 1938 when the Weiland Dairy published an article in *The Milk Plant Monthly* (*Milk Route* 1999a:1-2). Described in the article as a “pioneering advance,” Weiland initiated the use of trucks with compartments holding 50 pounds of dry ice to cool up to 24 cases of milk to temperatures of “40 degrees or lower on the hottest days” (in Chicago, Illinois). They boasted to their customers that they had “Refrigerated Service to Your Home.” The trucks include space for six cases of milk for use “at the beginning of

² By the 1940s, Alamogordo’s only soda bottler delivered his products in an unmarked pickup truck (Lockhart 1998:8; 2001; 2011).

routes or in the early morning before the milk will change its temperature very considerably after leaving the plant” and room for nine cases of empties on top. In addition, the driver’s compartment contained room for “two ‘working’ cases.”

Dairy Size and the Use of Creameries

As in the rest of the state, most dairies were family-run businesses, although dairy experts as late as the 1940s suggested that a single farm family could only care for 10-15 cows. Child labor was considered a necessity on the farm; children could be used productively even on Sundays (Saturday was just a normal work day), holidays, and in the evening. Women, too, were vitally important in dairy work, although virtually all references were to “dairymen.” Because creameries were often distant, most local dairies produced their own butter – mostly through women’s labor (Jensen 2000:161, 164).

Although the Las Cruces Creamery had collection points at various places within the state, Otero County was not directly connected by rail. Creameries typically bought cream from dairies within a fifty mile radius, but some came from as far away as 400 miles (Jensen 2000:166). Because of the remoteness of Otero County, local dairies advertised their own cream, butter, and other dairy products until at least the early 1940s.

When local farmers and/or small dairies decided to sell their outputs to a creamery, the one in El Paso was most likely chosen. The first to take advantage of the new market was the Smith Bros. Dairy in Cloudcroft in 1921 (*Alamogordo News* October 6, 1921). Fred M. Griffin, Jr. described the process a typical small producer went through:

Starting in 1928, we started shipping cream. Willard [Fred’s older brother] went to school at Tularosa High for a year or year and a half, and he worked at a dairy. He told us we could make money by shipping cream, so we milked two times daily. The calves would drink and nuzzle and we would milk. We’d cover it until it clabbered and the cream would come to the top. We would skim it, put it in five gallon cans, and ship it to the El Paso Creamery Company.³

³ The El Paso Creamery Co. was listed in the El Paso City Directories from 1914 to 1930 when it was replaced by Mistletoe Creamery.

We'd take our cans of cream to the Elk Post Office and send them by the mail carrier, George Gililand, to Cloudcroft, where it then went on to El Paso [presumably by rail]. He had a light wagon and team and would leave one day to go to Cloudcroft with the mail, returning the next day with our mail. When we sent this cream by him, it soured, and they used it to make butter. We'd have a couple of cans a week. We always got a premium price for our cream because Mom was so sanitary. Our empty cans would get back from Cloudcroft with the mail carrier also (Tularosa Basin Historical Society 1985:180).

Ice Boxes and Refrigeration

Between 1830 and 1860, the use of ice boxes spread across the United States. These were essentially insulated metal boxes with two compartments, one that held block ice to provide the cooling effect and the other containing foods to be chilled. Prior to 1830, natural ice was harvested from rivers, ponds, and lakes during the winter and placed in ice houses for use in the hotter months. Although the first ice machine was patented by German engineer Carl Linde in 1876, the patent rights were not available for use in the U.S. until the Fred W. Wolf Co. of Chicago, Illinois, obtained the use of the Linde machines in 1881. The availability of goods via the railroad created an immediate market availability for ice boxes and other modern conveniences of the day from the very foundation of the community (Spearman 1999:17-18).

With the availability of ice from the Carl Ice Plant upon the arrival of the railroad in 1898, Alamogordo residents used ice boxes to refrigerate their milk from the inception of the town. While ice boxes helped preserve foods and drinks, they were very inefficient compared to the later electric refrigerators. Because ice boxes were the norm, most dairies delivered milk to residences twice a day, once in the mornings and once in the afternoons.⁴ With this frequency of delivery and the inefficiency of the ice boxes, pints were the most popular container size. A pint of milk could be used relatively quickly and replaced at the next delivery.

A standardized refrigerator using Freon-12 was developed in the early 1930s. However, the average person in a small town or rural community probably did not own a refrigerator until after World War II, and the Alamogordo Ice and Coal Co. offered "Daily Delivery in

⁴ Otero County dairies stopped advertising twice daily deliveries after 1923

Alamogordo ICE BOXES” until late 1936. It was not until 1944 that use of electric refrigerators increased to the point where 70% of U.S. households owned one (Spearman 1999:19-21; *Alamogordo Advertiser* May 7, 1936).

When refrigerators became the norm, delivery methods changed, and milk was only delivered once a day – in the morning. Because of the increased efficiency of refrigeration, quarts became the most popular container size, although that size had been growing in popularity during the 1930s. Still later, home delivery was reduced to three days a week. One route would be delivered Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, the other, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. City Dairy continued making home deliveries until the late 1960s when supermarket shopping and improved preservation methods eliminated the need for residential service. Although only the smallest container sizes (half- and quarter-pints) had been discontinued, the most common containers became half-gallons and gallons.

Advertising

Throughout many of the early years of Otero County, the bulk of vended milk came from small “dairy men” who milked a few extra cows and sold the milk to several customers. These dairymen often delivered to their customers’ doors in Alamogordo. This domination of the dairy industry by small owners may have increased during the years of World War I when many commodities were scarce.

Because there were few dairymen who advertised in the local newspaper, new arrivals in town were often at a loss as to how to locate a reliable source for fresh milk. Many of them contacted the *Alamogordo News* and requested the names of local dairymen to provide service. The editor stated that he was happy to provide this service with the names he knew, “but there is a probability that some of the dairy men are left out. If the dairymen⁵ in and around Alamogordo will leave their names at the News office, The News will be glad to let the newcomers know that they are in business (*Alamogordo News* July 3, 1919).”

⁵ Note that both “dairy men” and “dairymen” are used in the same article.

Instead of column ads, some small dairymen placed brief notices in the personal section. The *Alamogordo Cloudcrofter* noted in 1921 that:

Mr. & Mrs. E. E. Cooperall of Valmount [an Otero County town no longer in existence], have established a milk and butter depot in this city on Tenth Street, and will supply the local trade with milk, butter, eggs, and cream. They own a splendid herd of dairy cattle, and have heretofore shipped their products to El Paso. They will maintain a delivery service to any part of town (*Alamogordo Cloudcrofter* May 27, 1921).

The Cooperalls, however, did not advertise in the newspaper. Two years later (1923), M.G. Barber informed the public, “Having resumed the dairy business I am delivering good Jersey milk at 12½ cents a quart. A share of your patronage solicited” (*Alamogordo News* May 17, 1923). Like the Cooperalls, Barber never placed an ad. Dairy advertisements and notices were scarce and of short duration until Bass Dairy began its long but inconsistent series of ads on May 12, 1927.

The Development of Larger Dairies

Around the 1940s, more and more local milk producers sold their output to creameries and larger dairies. This increase in regional rather than local sales was enhanced by improved refrigeration both in storage and transportation. Perishable goods (including milk and milk products) could now be better shipped by both truck and rail. Along with creameries, local dairies (including those that still milked cows as a sideline) could sell excess milk to City Dairy, Otero County’s largest wholesale producer. Ironically, when City Dairy developed a surplus, the McMurry brothers sold their increase to Price’s Dairy in El Paso.

By the 1950s, the small, independent dairy was only a memory. Although small producers still sold to City Dairy and Creameries, they no longer delivered milk to homes or stores. The era of the larger dairy had arrived in Otero County, and it was personified by only one entity: City Dairy.

The rise of the supermarket produced other problems for local dairies. Shortly after World War II, City Dairy had relatively little non-local competition. With sales divided between home delivery and small family grocery stores with limited storage space, a local base of

operations was necessary. The increased capacity of the supermarket allowed a dairy to introduce large quantities of milk at a time, and improved processing and storage life allowed deliveries to become less frequent. Outside competition in the form of the giant dairies entered the picture.

Price's Dairy, based in El Paso, was the first outside giant to enter the Otero County market. Price's ads for ice cream appeared in the *Alamogordo News* as early as 1949. Other El Paso Dairies, such as Farmers, Wholesome, and The Borden Co., soon followed along with New Mexico dairies such as Creamland from Albuquerque. By the late 1970s, increased competition, coupled with a constantly changing technological process and the age of its owners, forced City Dairy, Otero County's last holdout, to close its doors. The era of the local dairy was over.

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