

## *“From Pasture to Pantry”*

Dairy farming was once one of Mount Desert Island's principal industries. The growth of the the tourist industry in the late nineteenth century led farmers to expand their dairy herds. By the early twentieth century, there were over 40 dairy farms.

In 1761, when Mount Desert Island was first settled, cattle were used for labor and beef—milk was a by-product of beef cattle and used primarily in cheese and butter. By 1796, the town of Eden could boast of an average of three head of cattle per household.

As the tourist industry began to rise, the prospect of making a living from dairy products encouraged Island farmers. The major obstacle for farmers at the end of the nineteenth century was providing clean disease free milk. Most urban dairies had already begun to pasteurize milk and that was the standard the summer residents expected from Mount Desert Island farmers. However, while taking sanitation seriously, few farmers could afford to fully modernized their farms.

The demand for pasteurized milk led to the formation of the Mount Desert Island Dairies, a cooperative, in 1932. The shareholders invested in pasteurization equipment. Farmers who did not join the cooperative invested in the pasteurization equipment on their own or sent their milk to larger dairies.

Still, the 1930s was a difficult time for dairy farmers not only because of costly milk sanitation requirements but because the country was reeling from the Great Depression.

After World War II, farmers saw a short term recovery in the local dairy industry. In the 1940s, the marketing of the American milk began in earnest. It was sold as “Nature's Perfect Food.” The American public was convinced that children who did not drink enough milk would be undernourished.

By the 1950s, large grocery chains opened all over Maine and eventually in the Ellsworth and Mount Desert Island area. Large dairies could provide the stores with large volume at low prices. People were swayed by the lower prices at the chain stores.

The last two dairies on the Island closed in the 1980s. Today the large dairy barns stand as a reminder of days gone by. The good news is that the recent demand for organic milk may lead to a come back of dairy farming on the island. At least one former dairy farm may be used as an organic dairy in the near future.

## **Timeline of Dairy History**

- 1796** - Eden families own an average of three head of cattle.
- 1830s-1850s** - First Jersey, Guernsey and Holstein cattle imported to the United States.
- 1856** - Pasteur begins his experiments.
- 1856** - Gail Borden receives patent for condensed milk.
- 1884** -Milk bottle invented by Dr. Hervey D. Thatcher
- 1876 - 1929** - Tourism and cottage era leads to demand for fresh local milk and produce. Dairy industry booms and market gardens flourish. Eden establishes an Agricultural Society and begins the Eden Fair.
- 1878** - Maine Board of Agriculture reports first herd of registered Jerseys on Mount Desert Island.
- 1882** - Harry Bordeaux opens first commercial dairy on Mount Desert Island.
- 1892** - Tuberculin testing of dairy herds introduced. Test for fat content of milk and cream perfected.
- 1895** - Commercial pasteurizing machines introduced.
- 1919** - Homogenized milk sold for the first time in Connecticut
- 1930s** - The Great Depression puts an end to the free spending days of the 1920s. Fewer cottagers return to Bar Harbor in the summer and the demand for fresh produce and milk drops. New sanitation requirements for the dairy industry are costly for farmers.
- 1932** - Mount Desert Island Dairies cooperative formed.
- 1932** - Plastic coated paper milk cartons introduced
- 1942** - Every-other-day milk delivery required as war conservation method.
- 1964** - Plastic milk container introduced.
- 1981** - Clark's Dairy closes. Last processing plant on MDI.
- 1986** - Rocky Porter sells the last dairy herd on the Island.
- 1987** - Bordeaux Dairy closes. Last dairy dealer on Mount Desert Island.
- 2002** - Plans introduced to use former Fogg Farm Dairy for Organic Dairy Farm .