

OUR DAIRY OPERATION

In addition to other farming activities Dad ran a small dairy on 103 acres of Land on Webb Gin House Road in the Snellville/Fiveforks area of Gwinnett County from 1937 to 1948. He purchased the dairy from his father-in-law, Larkin T. Brownlee, on McGee Road about 1935, and moved it to Webb Gin House Road in 1937 when he bought the family farm from Grandpa, John T. Ewing.

It was one of several small dairy operations in the community and consisted of about a dozen Jersey and Guernsey cows. He sold the dairy products on a route of regular customers in Avondale, Decatur, East Atlanta, East Lake, Kirkwood, and Little Five Points, most eastern suburbs of Atlanta, and a few customers in Atlanta proper. Some customers were prior residents, or descendants of, farms in the Snellville/Fiveforks community.

After moving to Webb Gin House Road, Dad built a separate milking barn, modern for that time, with a concrete floor and individual milking/feeding stalls (It was the last structure to be demolished when Brightwater sub-division was developed on the family farm property). All milking of the cows was done by hand twice daily, early morning and late afternoon.

He also built a milkhouse for processing the milk. There the milk was first strained and then cooled in a large commercial size icebox, using two 100lb blocks of ice weekly. Part of the milk was later clabbered and churned in a wooden 50-gallon barrel churn. The churn was on a frame and was turned end over end by a belt from a stationary one-cylinder engine located outside the milkhouse. After we got electricity, we installed an electric motor inside the milkhouse to turn the churn.

The butter was removed from the churn, and processed by hand. It was molded into half-pound cakes on an enamel-coated sheet/tray, then placed in the icebox. Later it was wrapped in waxed butter paper and placed in boxes or baskets ready for delivery to customers.

In those days milk was sold in quart glass bottles, which were used over and over again. When the milk was delivered, the customer returned an equal number of bottles that had been hand washed by the customer. All the bottles were brush-washed and rinsed again in very hot water before refilling. Bottling was all done manually the night before "route day". The milk was poured from large (3-5 gallon) containers into a pitcher, then each bottle filled individually. Both whole milk (sweetmilk) and buttermilk was sold. After each bottle was filled, a cardboard stopper, with a pull-tab, was manually inserted into each bottle. The bottles were then placed in milk crates and returned to the icebox until the next morning. Customers liked the glass bottles because they could see the amount of cream on top of the sweetmilk. The more Jersey cows in the herd, the thicker the cream and the richer the butter.

It was common for some small dairy operations to deliver their products using the one and only family car. Dad first used a 1931 Chevrolet, next a 1937 Ford. The rear seat, including the back, was removed from the family car on route day. Milk crates, boxes of butter, and baskets or crates of eggs were carefully placed where the back seat had been, filling the entire area up to the back of the front seat. The milk crates and butter boxes were covered with chipped ice in summer. Dad then acquired a 1937 Chevrolet Pick-up truck, and added a "top" typically used by "peddlers". Near the end of WWII he was able to get a 1940 Chevrolet Pick-up truck. A pick-up truck was quite an improvement to this whole operation. The pick-up then became the only family vehicle.

Shortly after WWII increased emphasis from the State was placed on more sanitary handling of dairy products, and rightly so. It would have required building a new milking barn and milkhouse, to State specifications. Pasteurization was required shortly thereafter, followed by Homogenization. This usually resulted in the small dairy operation selling their products wholesale to the larger dairy operations. Dad closed the dairy because he could not cost effectively implement the improvements dictated by the State. The glass milk bottle soon disappeared - - along with most of the small dairies in Gwinnett County and the rest of Georgia.

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(Stuff I remember. This article
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