

GEOGRAPHICAL RECORD NOTE

CHANGE IN AMERICA'S DAIRYLAND

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A traveler in Wisconsin today will pass numerous abandoned barns. Some of them, bereft of their cows, have been consigned to various alternate uses; others, with sagging walls or collapsed roofs, have lost all utility. That numerous Wisconsin farmers have ceased to milk cows is clear. Many of the remaining dairy farmers are housing and feeding their herds indoors rather than in pastures and, increasingly, are storing silage in huge, plastic-sheathed tubes. Traditional barns are sometimes supplanted by enormous, modern, free-stall structures, particularly on farms with hundreds of cows, which, though still atypical, are appearing. Wisconsin's role as "America's Dairyland" is clearly changing.

WISCONSIN AS AMERICA'S DAIRYLAND

By the 1920s Wisconsin had established itself as America's Dairyland. The 1920 census showed that, for the first time, Wisconsin, having surpassed New York, had more dairy cows than did any other state. Producing more milk than could be marketed in fluid form to urban centers of the region, more than three-quarters of Wisconsin's milk was used in manufactured dairy products. Wisconsin's 2,500 cheese factories made 165,000 metric tons of cheese in 1925, 72.2 percent of the nation's total (WCERS 1955). Ninety-one percent of the state's 189,295 farmers had milk cows in 1920 (USBC 1922), and beginning in 1922 the sale of milk provided more than half of Wisconsin's farm income (WCERS 1955).

Wisconsin remained the nation's leading dairy state for nearly three-quarters of a century but lost its lead to California in milk production in 1993 and in the size of its dairy herd in 1998. Southwestern dairy production also expanded more rapidly than many agricultural experts had anticipated (WDTF 1987; Clark 1990). Wisconsin's share of the nation's milk output fell to 14.2 percent by 1999 (Table I), while California's share rose to 18.7 percent, exceeding Wisconsin's all-time maximum (WASS 2000b).

Many factors have caused this shift in production. Federal milk-marketing orders dating from the 1930s established minimum support prices based on distance from Eau Claire, Wisconsin. In 1999 producers in the southeastern states received monthly milk payments that averaged nearly \$2.00 per hundredweight (44 liters) more than did those in Wisconsin (WASS 2000b). California is not part of the federal plan, but it similarly protects its milk producers and mandates higher standards for fluid milk products (Butler and Wolf 2000). States in the Midwest show

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