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Creating Dairyland: How Caring For Cows Saved Our Soil, Created Our Landscape, Brought Prosperity to Our State, and Still Shapes Our Way of Life in Wisconsin

Edward Janus
Wisconsin Historical Society Press (June 2011)
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"The lowing heard wind slowly o'er the lea, / The plowman homeward plods his weary way," wrote Thomas Gray in *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*.

In *Creating Dairyland,* Edward Janus, historian, dairy farmer, and creator of programs for public radio and Voice of America, has prepared an ode to the Wisconsin cow. He speaks of dairyland as cows, barns, silos, and "the undulating green of grasses," and provides a history of the people who "lived with mud, manure, and milk."

While King Cotton ruled the south in the 1860s, King Wheat reined in the Midwest. By 1860 Wisconsin was first in wheat-producing states. In the 1870s, however, those yields began to decline as the land became less fertile due to poor farming habits. The fever of land speculation and the chinch bug alighting like locusts completed the wheat devastation.

Farm reformers believed livestock was the antidote; planting grass transformed the wheat fields into pastures for dairy cattle. As farmers accumulated more milk than they could use for family use, they bartered milk, butter, and cheese for products at the general store.

Improved farming led to the creation of the Wisconsin dairying industry. Three of its components of productivity were grasses of clover and alfalfa, manure, "deposits in the bank of the soil," and the silo for feed storage that enabled year-round milking. The fourth was a transformation of the relationship between cows and humans in the "intimate setting" of the barn, which allowed the farmers to get to know Belle, Bessie, and Brownie.

The larger portion of the book is "conversations with farmers and cheese makers": anecdotes of "love for cows, the land, and the work." Interviews include such subjects as former National Guernsey Princess Hannah Iverson, about her business of heifer calves, the Mayers family, concerning their 100-year-old dairy farm, and Sid Cooks, on his desire for consistency in cheddar cheese making.

There are twenty-three "silos" of information–sidebars–each with a cow cameo. Topics include "Freestall Barns" for cow comfort, and "The Motherhood Business" that discusses breeding. To make breeding more efficient a "small, pressure-sensitive device is attached to a potentially receptive cow," which signals to the farmer's computer a "You've Got Male" message that initiates the summoning of the inseminator.

Writing with bucolic simplicity, the author evokes an idyllic atmosphere, but regrets not being able to include in his story the smells "that are the real stuff of dairying" and the "music of lowing cows."

Finally, *Creating Dairyland* is a book about contented cows and the men and women that manage them.
ALEX MOORE (May 16, 2011)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The author of this book provided free copies of the book and paid a small fee to have their book reviewed by a professional reviewer. Foreword Reviews and Clarion Reviews make no guarantee that the author will receive a positive review. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.