

THE MILK ALWAYS GETS THROUGH

Written by Barry Mather, Prominent newspaper writer and humorist and printed in the pamphlet "The Story of Dairyland" in 1950.

Without milk the city could perish.

Every month, Dairyland delivers over 1 ¹/₂ million quarts of milk - maintaining a constant, life-giving stream from country to city.

How does the city get this milk? Come along with us and find out.

One sunny Tuesday morning we rode around in one of the eighty-five big trucks which haul milk for Dairyland and the Fraser Valley Milk Producers' Association, learning about the "pick-up" part of the milk business.



The truck we rode on belonged to Mr. Austin Loney. He is one of 32 hauling contractors. Strategically located in Valley centers, these contractors with their men and their trucks pick up the milk from 3,000 farms and bring it in to Dairyland or to the Association's other plants at Delair and Sardis.

Like most hauling contractors Loney drives a truck himself. He has three trucks. He and his men handle pick-up in West Langley, Port Kells and Barnston Island.



Loney was headed for Barnston Island. As we drove along the cool country road toward the ferry he said he had been hauling milk for 26 years ... that a 10-gallon can of milk, when full, weighs 130 pounds, "can and all."

He said we would cross the Fraser to Barnston Island, pick up the milk all around the Island and bring it back to Whalley's Corners on the Pacific Highway. There the cans would be loaded onto another Loney truck (the one that was picking up the milk from Port Kells) and then would be hauled into Dairyland.

It was something like riding along on a bus because milk trucks run on a close schedule to get their perishable cargo to the plant quickly.

We came down to the Fraser River. Loney pulled up on a little wharf. As he wangled his truck onto the ferry-scow he said, "There's no wharf on the other side-the flood took it out last year."

You could still see the 1948 flood mark, high on the sides of farm buildings. He said that the Island farmers were getting back on their feet, but that milk production here was not yet normal.

"We got all the dairy stock off before the dyke broke," Loney said. "But the people hung on till after she went."

"How'd you pick up milk in the flood with the cows all over the place?" we asked.

"Well," he said, "it was some job. We picked up Barnston milk pretty well all over the municipality - sometimes five and six o'clock at night before we got to town with it." Normally, Barnston Island milk gets to Dairyland around noon.

Having seen The Flood we were impressed with the fact that they got the milk at all.

The ferry nosed into the bank. Loney drove off and along the narrow dyke-top road beside the river. It was a lovely morning with the sun sparkling on the swift water and a breeze nodding the buttercups by the banks.



Loney said, "I mind the winters when they had to skate the milk across the river in sleighs. That was before they got the ferry. Now we try to keep the channel open. We've even hacked a channel out of the ice with cross-cut saws."

Our first pick-up stop was just a little way down the road from the ferry landing. There were four 10-gallon cans on this farmer's milk stand.

Loney had them off the stand and into the truck in no time. He got back into the driver's seat and said, "In the old days we used to have to pick cans from the ground and heft them up into the truck-pretty heavy going. There are still a few farms without milk stands, not many."

We had noticed that the cans of milk he had picked up were all numbered "624" and that so were the empty cans he put back on the stand. Loney said these shipper numbers were worked out on an alphabetical basis, in line with the farmers' names.

The 'second farm we came to was a bigger producer-nine cans on its stand. Loney said the farmer here had about 28 milking cows. He said most Island shippers now use milking machines-even the small shippers.

We jolted along the dyke road. At one point men were working on the dyke and Loney steered a careful course through a long stretch of sand.

At each stop the farmer had his milk cans up on his stand -two cans, six, eight. Loney made it seem easy, getting them aboard. Here and there a farm hand would come out, sometimes exchange a word or two with us, sometimes get a lift.

Loney seemed to know everybody. He had a good grasp of what was going on. For instance he gave us the following information: "Farmer at this place is building a new barn ... going to have a new system, a milking parlor for the stock and also a separate roaming parlor, with the cows not tied up... People who just ship one can have maybe two, three cowsThis place? A lady shipper operates itFarmers here start to do their milking around five a.m.-some other points in the Valley they start as early as three



a.m....This place here is where I got stuck in the snow-couldn't get up or down. Had to walk home. Next day about a dozen fellows came with shovels and dug the truck outThe farmers are very co-operative about helping out in trouble. Last winter it was just like a skating rink on top of the dyke. I finally had to leave two shippers go for the day ... they were on the other side of the Island ... but we brought their milk around later in a lighter vehicle"

"This milk trucking is a 365-day a year proposition. But here we work usually about a 42-hour week. We try to work it so we get three or four days off at a time....Reason we're picking up Barnston Island milk by truck is because the flood took most of the private little wharfs out....They used to pick up the Island milk on that boat we came across the river on...."

At Dairyland Wally Kendall, the Production Traffic Supervisor, had said, "The milk ALWAYS gets through." No matter what the weather conditions were like, he said the pick-up system would function.

"If necessary we can rush in more milk to Vancouver or we can shoot more to Sardis or Delair-the milk will ALWAYS get through."

Sitting in the truck beside Loney and thinking of his 26 winters and summers of "getting through" we could see what Kendall meant.

The thing that impressed us was Loney's enthusiasm about the Fraser Valley Milk Producers' Association. He was talking about this when we finished the circle of the Island and got on the ferry again.

"My dad was a milk shipper in the old days before the F.V.M.P.A. The old man lost hundreds of dollars at it ... and so did a lot of other farmers. They'd sell to some milk company and then many times they'd wait as much as 40 days for a milk cheque. I don't know how many of those companies went broke-and settled for only five cents on the dollar." He said the Association was the "salvation of the Valley dairy industry."



When Loney started trucking, 90 cans would be a good day's pick-up in his territory. "Now," he said, "I guess we'd do about 250 cans."

At Whalley's Corners we met the other Loney truck. Its driver and Loney loaded our cans of milk onto it, alongside the Port Kells milk.

As we got up into the truck, headed for Vancouver and Dairyland, Loney said of us, "Not much of a swamper-he didn't lift a can all the way around."

Dairy Industry Historical Society of BC