

PA Milk Marketing Board
Carol A. Hardbarger

A Matter of Perspective

I had the privilege a number of years ago to spend some time in the Snake River area of eastern Idaho, which is also home to some of the largest potato-growing farms in the country. The history behind these operations is pretty interesting and was largely shaped by the Homestead Act of 1862 and subsequent related legislation such as the Carey Act of 1894 which granted up to 1 million federal acres for farming as long as they would be irrigated. .

Any citizen who had not taken up arms against the US government could declare rights to a 160-acre plot of land on which to develop a homestead. This was certainly something that was attractive to many young and old alike who were fascinated by the western part of the country because of its open spaces and sense of freedom.

As time progressed and more transplants to Idaho wanted to enter the commercial potato business, it became obvious that 160 acres was not enough in that part of the country to have a thriving farm operation. The annual rainfall was not sufficient to support the crop. The soil was ideal, but irrigation was necessary. Many small homesteads were sold and consolidated into much larger farms, many of which are in existence today.

Perspective.

In Pennsylvania, a 160-acre farm is not uncommon. In fact, our geography creates situations in which smaller farms are the norm. We are also blessed with good soil in most parts of the state and adequate rainfall in most years to support crops. (The Lehigh Valley and certain areas of the northwest part of the state are known for potatoes.)

Many dairies in Pennsylvania are operated on 160 acres or less, and yet many in the industry fear sales and consolidation of our small farms. Our perspective has been that the culture surrounding our dairy industry has always been shaped by our small dairy farms; in fact, we know that 85 percent of our farms milk herds of 100 or fewer cows.

Just as Idahoans have come to recognize the value and need for large-scale potato farming, Pennsylvanians identify with and embrace the concept of the small, local dairy farm and the many small, family-owned businesses that buy milk from them and manufacture quality dairy products.

The Board licenses many businesses that market some form of dairy product to consumers within the commonwealth; some of these also sell products out-of-state. The products run the full gamut and include raw milk, processed fluid beverages, cheese of many varieties, sherbet and ice cream products, candy, butter, ice cream mix and even livestock feed.

Pennsylvania is lucky enough to have both a Cheese Trail (<http://pacheeseguild.org/cheese-trail-map>) and an Ice Cream Trail (<https://www.visitpa.com/trip/scoops>). If you haven't traveled these trails, they are worth including in your summer day-trip plans.

Visiting businesses along these trails as well as purchasing products from your local dairies and farm stores or buying locally processed products from your grocery store helps support Pennsylvania's dairy industry. Some people have told me they don't want to pay the additional 50 cents or so that retail outlets charge for non-store brands just to buy locally processed milk. My response is always to ask them to think about things "in perspective," considering the importance of those local businesses to many of our rural economies and the freshness and quality of the products.

And, remember, many of your store brands are processed in Pennsylvania using milk from Pennsylvania dairy cows. Check the plant code on the label. A code of 42 is Pennsylvania-processed milk and you can go a step farther by buying PA Preferred with the green checkmark. PA Preferred milk is milk that is produced, processed, and then sold in Pennsylvania. Please contact me if you need help in how to identify the plant code on milk that you buy.

The Board and staff support the Pennsylvania dairy industry and encourage the purchase of local and PA-processed dairy products.

PMMB is always available to respond to questions and concerns. I can be reached at 717-210-8244 or by email at chardbarge@pa.gov.