

HISTORY OF THE DAIRY INDUSTRY IN THE MID NORTH

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The following is a reproduction of an interview with Messrs Don Zweck and Murray Klemm, Members of the Barossa Mid North Dairy Co-op at the Klemm home in Moculta, March 5th 2009. References 1 & 2 are gratefully acknowledged and were supplied by Trevor Pomery, Sales and Marketing Manager, for Golden North Pty Ltd.

Dairying in the Mid North of South Australia had its beginnings with herds of up to 12 milking cattle which were run in conjunction with a sheep and cropping combination. Milk was separated and cream was transported to the local butter factories in Balaclava and Gawler. By the mid 1940s machine milking came into vogue. Initially a GVB (Gordon Vacuum Break) bucket machine was used by Murray for individual cows. By 1946 Don was using an Alpha Daisy machine with an overhead milk line. Herds increased in size to 20 cows.

By the 1950s the collection of whole milk had been introduced leading to milk being used for liquid milk consumption. It was processed by Golden North Dairies Ltd who installed the Tetra Pak to replace milk bottles. This company also introduced a coffee flavoured milk drink on to the market along with other flavoured milks.

The Saddleworth Cheese factory began operations and farmer co-operatives were formed in 1950. Initially the Mid North Co-operative Dairymen's Association, and subsequently the Barossa Co-operative Dairymen's Association were formed to co-ordinate the sale of their milk. Golden North Dairies Ltd owned by John and later Barry Bowker being the selling agent.

Dairy farmers outside of the area served by the Metropolitan Milk Board were excluded from the higher prices being paid for liquid milk being sold in the Adelaide metropolitan area. This included producers to the South and North of the Metropolitan area. Instead they received manufactured milk prices eg. milk being used for butter and cheese and milk powder production.

In times of low milk production the Golden North Company introduced an incentive payment system to persuade producers to maintain a higher level of production throughout the year. The Company also arranged to purchase accommodation milk from Adelaide companies during these periods, to augment their ice cream and liquid milk markets. Keeping their milk cool was a continuing problem for mid north producers during the summer months. It ranged from standing cans in

half 44 gallon drums of water, to covering the cans with wet bags as they were placed on the roadside stands waiting for collection.

Subsequently cooling towers were used to cool milk as quickly as possible as it flowed over milk coolers. Eventually refrigerated vats have been installed and milk collected in milk tankers.

Modern day herds have increased to 200 head, herds being production recorded and artificial breeding used as a means of improving herd management and subsequent gross margins.

GOLDEN NORTH

WHITE MILK

Ref 1

A Brief History

- 1870 :- The Bowker family moved to Laura, 240 kms north of Adelaide.
- 1880 :- The Bowkers started selling fresh milk from their dairy in Tetra Classic pyramid shaped packs.
- 1900 :- The dairy herd was increased to 90 milking cows.
- 1930's :- Glass milk bottles were introduced into the marketplace.
- 1938 :- Golden North were the first company to introduce pasteurized milk to country SA.
- 1958 :- Tetra milk cartons were first introduced and glass bottles faded out. This coincided with the introduction of Homogenized milk.
- 1960's :- During this period Golden North had the longest milk run in the world, stretching from the Barossa Valley to Tennant Creek (over 1200 miles).
- 1983 :- Golden North was sold to the South Australian Farmers Cooperative Union (Farmers Union)
- 1991 :- Farmers Union after many takeovers evolves to become National Foods.

- 2001 :- November - Golden North is purchased from National Foods by a group of South Australian businessmen.
- 2007 :- To celebrate 5 years of local ownership Golden North white milk is launched into the Adelaide metropolitan market.

GOLDEN NORTH

A PROUD HISTORY

Ref 2

The history of Golden North has been linked from the beginning with the South Australian Mid-North town of Laura, still the site of the firm's main operations.

The formal beginnings of the current day Golden North came in 1923, there is however a link as far back as the 1880's. For it was about 1880 that William Bowker was attracted to the new mining ventures being opened up in Broken Hill. He found dairy and garden produce in short supply and subsequently went into business supplying the people of Broken Hill with scalded cream from the family property at Laura in SA.

The cream was delivered to the Gladstone rail head by horse and dray, and since there was no refrigeration, it was covered with wet bags for the overnight journey to Broken Hill.

Control of the business was handed over in 1903 to William's son Percival Bowker.

In 1923 the first ice tank was installed at Laura, together with two cold rooms. The one ton capacity tank was kept busy supplying ice for packing the cream before railing, and for local sales.

Soon after-in 1923- came the formation of the Laura Ice Company, primarily to serve the growing needs of both the local and Broken Hill trade. This signified the real beginning of today's Golden North organization.

Several significant steps were taken in 1925: the extensions to the factory at Laura, the establishment of the Laura Ice and Produce Company as a

private limited company, and the importation from the United States of a glass-lined cream cooking vat.

Sales of local cream increased steadily, and ice cream began gaining popularity.

To meet the growing demand, the Laura Ice and Produce Company increased the size of its plant and installed its first churn freezer.

Ice cream was made and freezing was done by packing the ice cream tub with ice and adding salt to give, in effect, a brine solution.

By 1930 there was further progress. Electricity became available from local plants, and refrigeration began being more widely used.

In the decade 1930 – 1940 the Laura Ice and Produce Company was involved primarily with the manufacture of cream, ice cream and butter, but later in the period the introduction of a butter zoning scheme ruled out further manufacturing at Laura.

Port Pirie began to emerge as part of the operation in 1938 for the supply of fresh milk . There was a big demand from locals and visiting ships. To improve the keeping quality of the milk, the Laura Ice and Produce Company decided to offer the first pasteurized milk in the area and it was a step the proved extremely popular.

In 1938 the company began pasteurizing milk at Laura and milk sales developed during the wartime years with Woomera and other military establishments being set up in the region.

The next major advancement was the introduction of bottled milk.

Agreement was made with the Moyles soft drink company and the milk bottling plant was moved into part of their premises. It remained there until the introduction of Tetra Classic milk packs in the early sixties.

Golden North Dairies Ltd was formed in 1948 to cater for the increasing trade and in the same year a formal agency was set up in Broken Hill.

Growth has continued since the early 1950's, with the most significant challenge being the replacement of bottles with Tetra Pak cartons.

During the 1970's Golden North expanded to a stage where the broad limits of the area it served extended from Gawler in the south, north to Tennant Creek and from Ceduna in the west to Broken Hill in the east.

The Bowker family sold the Golden North business in 1983 to the South Australian Southern Farmers Group (Farmers Union). Southern Farmers decided to launch Golden North Ice Cream into the larger market of

Adelaide and introduced the Slice-n-Serve sausage pack. This eventually gave way to the more popular plastic 2 Litre tubs.

In 1991 National Foods was formed, of which Southern Farmers and Golden North became part. Milk production had moved to Port Pirie and the Laura site concentrated solely on the production of Ice cream. National markets were established, primarily through the Foodservice channel.

In late 2001 a group of four South Australian businessmen purchased the Golden North business from National Foods. The factory remains in Laura to this day, producing ice cream for local and national customers.

The company has continued to grow with new markets and new products. Introducing a range of frozen yogurts and Sorbets for the interstate markets, and the securing of a major national Housebrand packing contract, have led to the introduction of a second daily shift and the hiring of more production staff.

This growth has seen annual production lift to approx 11 million litres, a long way from the humble beginnings back in 1923

Golden North has been long recognized for its quality products and has dominated the major awards for ice cream in the state i.e. The Royal Show Awards and The Dairy Industry Awards.

Golden North is now an official icon of South Australians having been included in the 2006 Bank SA Heritage Icons list.



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