FROM DAIRY VALLEY TO CHINO: AN EXAMPLE OF URBANIZATION IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA'S DAIRY LAND

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As with most economic activities, spatial movements in California's dairy industry are constantly influenced by fluctuating cultural and economic processes. Urbanization is perhaps the most critical process affecting the industry because it involves intensifying land uses and increasing population densities. Many dairy regions which served the Los Angeles Metropolitan area in the early 1950's to mid-1960's have since experienced drastic land-use transformation. This metamorphosis involved a conversion of dairy land-use to more urban-oriented land uses, particularly residential and commercial. In the recent past, three Southern California areas, Cypress, Dairyland, and Dairy Valley, incorporated in an effort to forestall encroaching urbanization and to preserve the land for dairying. When these areas incorporated in the mid-1950's, nearly all their land uses were associated with dairying, and their importance as a major milk-producing area for the Los Angeles market was firmly established. However, by the late 1960's, much of this dairying activity, along with most other agriculture, was eliminated.

This paper is an analysis of urbanization's influence on land use patterns in the Dairy Valley portion of Southern California. The urbanization process lasted little more than ten years and eliminated nearly all dairy land in the area in spite of the aforementioned effort to stop it.

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Historical Background

Most of the dairies in Southern California have been operated by Dutch and Portuguese people whose ancestors came to America from Holland or the Azores during the early 1900's. Both ethnic groups have contributed significantly to the functioning of the industry in Southern California, although the Dutch still control the majority (70%) of the dairies in the area. During the 1920's and 1930's, many dairies were in close proximity to Los Angeles (Figure 1). However, as that city expanded, these operations have proved vulnerable to the forces of urbanization. The long-term effect of urbanization has caused the industry, which first established in parts of the San Fernando Valley in the 1920's, to retreat in a south-easterly direction.

In each successive stage of settlement, a complex of interrelationships developed to service the industry and the personal needs of the area's inhabitants. Economic activities related to dairying, such as grain and hay sales, equipment services, cattle sales yards, and veterinary practices specializing in the care of dairy animals, located nearby. Along with these activities, a complementary labor force evolved. Although most dairying has now moved out of Los Angeles County, remnants of the area's past dairying activity can still be seen along the busy thoroughfares of many urban communities. As examples, grain suppliers are still located in Bellflower, Paramount, and Artesia. Cultural remnants exist in areas first settled by Dutch and Portuguese dairymen. Dutch Christian Reform Churches and schools remain in Bellflower, Paramount, and Artesia. Portuguese Catholic Churches are located in Artesia and Paramount. A grocery store specializing in Dutch imports is located in Bellflower, and one specializing in Portuguese foodstuffs is located in Artesia. Also, a unique Dutch bakery operates in Artesia.

When dairymen moved into the Dairy Valley region in the early 1950's, they realized that they must innovate a more lasting means to preserve the land for dairying and their strong community life.

Dairy Valley was, therefore, incorporated in 1956 with this one aim in mind. It was a unique city with more dairy cows than people; 100,000 cows resided on 400 dairies, while the human population was 3,500. Incorporation allowed the entire area to be zoned solely for agriculture, thus preventing the encroachment of any non-harmonious activity. Property taxes were kept to a minimum because land values were assessed in terms of agricultural use. Since the city was operated as a rural community, only the facilities necessary for dairying were provided. Municipal costs accordingly remained low, minimizing local taxes. Commercial activities necessary for the functioning of the industry were given variances to enable
establishment in the area. Most residential structures were associated with the dairies and such lots were kept to a five-acre minimum in order to prevent subdivision of the land. A pleasant, rural landscape was created where, for acre upon acre, all that could be seen were dairy farms. Dairying had indeed been preserved as a way of life for the inhabitants.

As part of the south-east milk-producing region, Dairy Valley produced nearly 80 percent of Los Angeles County's fluid milk.6

Basic to Dairy Valley's intensive production was the drylot technique of dairying. Introduced by the Dutch and Portuguese settlers, it entailed confining dairy animals in a corral and bringing feed to them. In this way, valuable energy is not expended and the feed can be controlled to ensure the highest possible production per cow. Also, since land is a high-cost factor in dairying, the drylot method enables dairymen to use it more intensively, as opposed to the pasture method. The results are a higher ratio of cows per acre of land, thereby increasing production, and a higher ratio of cows per person, thereby decreasing labor costs.7

Using the drylot method, dairymen in Los Angeles County were able to achieve higher production per cow than in any other county in the United States.8 But total production for the county, and for Dairy Valley, declined drastically since the early 1960's. Present county production is now less than one-fifth that of 1963.9 This decline occurred in an area whose inhabitants were dedicated to the preservation of dairying and a unique way of life which had been carefully cultivated.

Urbanization Applies Pressure

There were many reasons for Dairy Valley's decline as a milk-producing area. With Los Angeles' "urban sprawl" moving closer, the dairy land became more attractive to developers. As the land values rose, assessment procedures by the county
were revised. Land was no longer assessed by the county for its agricultural use, but rather for its potential urban use. From 1951 to 1964, assessed valuations increased nearly 450 percent. The Dairy Valley property tax per acre which averaged $20 in 1951, increased to $280 in 1964. Also, during this period, the tax rate rose almost 40 percent. Increasingly, the farmers' profits could not compensate for the extra tax burden imposed by the county and other taxing districts out of their control. Even though milk production costs in southern California are less than other areas, this advantage could not justify the use of high-cost land for a basically low-income industry.

Those dairymen who were farsighted (and who also might be accused of being speculators) knew it would not be long before urban development would force its way into the area. The lure of profit on high-priced land eventually became too great to resist. Dairymen increasingly realized they could sell their land for attractive profits and establish new, modern dairies elsewhere. Thus, the farmers' resolution to remain in the area was gradually diminished.

As urbanization approached the periphery of Dairy Valley, conflicts developed which increased operating costs and undermined the dairymen's pride as members of the community. Complaints from nearby residents about odors and flies were common. The complaints caused enforcement of stricter health inspection codes which, in turn, required many dairies to undertake expensive control programs. Also, as vacant land near the dairies was subdivided and developed, it could no longer be used for waste disposal from barns.

Neighborhood nuisance problems also appeared. New children, seeing the vast open fields, were tempted to play on the farmland. Occasionally, acts of malicious mischief resulted in haystacks being set afire. The possibility of such fires prevented purchase and storage of hay when the price was lowest. They were, consequently, unable to take advantage of lower hay prices and had to pay the going price for hay as it
was needed. At present, because of the 1976-77 drought, the price of hay is about $100 per ton, which is three times its cost in 1965.

Recognizing the above problems, voters modified the city ordinances in 1965 to permit subdivisions of less than five acres per residence. This vote was the deciding factor in the eventual urbanization of Dairy Valley.

Land-Use Transition and Urban Growth

From 1960 to 1976, a dramatic change in land-use occurred. In 1960, agricultural land-use was predominant, covering approximately 70 percent of the total area, whereas urban uses occupied only 7 percent (Figure 2). At this time, there were nearly 4,000 inhabitants in Dairy Valley. Between 1966 and 1973, almost 200 new residential tracts were built in the city. Each new tract ate away at land devoted to dairying, until, by 1970, agricultural land-use was reduced to approximately 34 percent. Urban uses occupied 30 percent of the total and the remaining land became largely vacant (Figure 2). By 1970 the city had been renamed Cerritos, and its population was 15,800. The population has now reached 43,000 and urban land-use covers approximately 75 percent of the total area, while only 8 percent remains in agriculture (Figure 2). Only 14 dairies remain in Dairy Valley and the chance of their continuing existence is uncertain, for the 1973 Cerritos Master Plan calls for the elimination of all agriculture by 1980.

Outmigration of Dairies

The major period of outmigration occurred between 1965 and 1970. During 1965 and 1966, nearly 100 dairies moved out of Dairy Valley. In the early phase of the outmigration, dairymen had no problem selling their land. After 1967, the Master Plan was approved, thereby determining all land-use development within the city and providing for an orderly transition from an agricultural community to a suburban community.
Due to very specific zoning conditions set forth by this Master Plan, some dairymen experienced difficulty selling their land.

To better evaluate the effects of Dairy Valley's urbanization on its former rural inhabitants, questionnaires were sent to dairymen who relocated from Dairy Valley to the Chino valley region, the most frequent relocation destination. The results reveal that no single factor influenced the decision to relocate.

Seventeen percent chose to move solely because of the early opportunity to realize a large profit, since land was selling at $25,000 per acre in 1965. Fourteen percent of the respondents indicated that their move was prompted by the desire to update their facilities. This group, burdened by outdated equipment, viewed the land sale as a means to finance the establishment of a more modern dairy farm.

The balance of the respondents indicated that various negative pressures compelled them to relocate. Twenty-seven percent stated that as farm renters in Dairy Valley, they were forced to move subsequent to the sale of their rented farms. Since other rental farms were not available at this time in Dairy Valley, relocation became necessary. The remaining respondents were almost equally divided between mounting property taxes and growing urban harrassment as reasons for abandoning Dairy Valley.

Relocation of the Industry

Since Dairy Valley was the last concentrated dairy region in Los Angeles County, the outmigration of these dairies has practically stripped the county of its milk producers. Once the leading milk-producing county in California, Los Angeles has relinquished its dairy production to areas farther from the market.

Chino Valley, located in parts of San Bernardino and Riverside counties, is the last extensive area in southern California capable of producing for the large Los Angeles milk
market. About 100 dairies from Dairy Valley were relocated in Chino Valley.\textsuperscript{23} When questioned about the advantages of moving to Chino, dairymen cited large amounts of inexpensive land and low taxes as principal reasons. Also, the milk haul from Chino Valley to the Los Angeles metropolitan area is much shorter and less expensive than from the San Joaquin valley, California's other extensive dairy region. The moderate climate was also considered an advantage over San Joaquin, even though the average temperatures are more extreme than in Dairy Valley.

Chino Valley is now the most productive dairy region in southern California; however, many dairymen feel it is only a matter of time before the dairies must again migrate. An overwhelming 70 percent of the Chino Valley respondents felt urbanization would eventually force them out of their area.

Conclusion

Dairy farming as a way of life has been preserved in southern California by generations of Dutch and Portuguese people at the cost of continued relocation. Because the perishability of milk necessitates locating close to market and because large amounts of land are needed for operation, dairying usually develops on the urban fringe of its market area. Since the urban fringe is dynamic, any land-use patterns not compatible with urban expansion are forced farther from the population center, as evidenced by the southern California dairy industry.

NOTES


\textsuperscript{2}Incorporation was possible through the California Government Code, Section 34,302.

\textsuperscript{3}S. Fidman, \textit{The Cerritos Factbook} (published by the City of Cerritos, date uncertain), p. 5.

\textsuperscript{4}Fielding, p. 16.

6 This percentage was obtained by taking the number of milk cows in both L. A. County and Dairy Valley, and multiplying each figure by the average annual milk production per cow in California for 1960 as listed by the California Crop and Livestock Reporting Service.


10 Irving, p. 2.


12 Fidman, p. 5.


14 Ibid., p. 46.

15 Ibid., p. 16.

16 Ibid., p. 1.

17 Information obtained from the Planning Department of the City of Cerritos.


21 There was a 42 percent response from 75 questionnaires sent to Chino Valley dairymen who had relocated from Dairy Valley.