The Pioneer Dairy Organization

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The Wisconsin Dairymen’s Association was organized in 1872, at a time when agriculture was at a very low ebb in this state, owing to the single crop system. It would be presumptuous for one specially interested to say that the wonderful progress of the state in dairying and agriculture was due only to the efforts of this association, but unprejudiced and competent observers have stated that it has been the greatest single force in accomplishing this result. Since its organization the dairy products of Wisconsin have increased from $1,000,000 annually to over $190,000,000 annually, and our state now stands first among the states in value of dairy products and in number of dairy cows, and she is pointed out in all regions as the pattern for successful cow keeping and has become the Mecca for buyers of pure-bred and grade dairy cattle.

The first problem met and solved was the securing of a good market for Wisconsin’s dairy products and advertising their quality. Going hand in hand with this was the improvement in the quality of the product, which was accomplished through meetings and institutes of farmers, and through the employment of inspectors and instructors to visit creameries and cheese factories. This work was the forerunner of the Farm Institutes, the Dairy School, and the Dairy and Food Commission, and it was largely through the initiative and influence of this association and its members that the establishment of these institutions was accomplished and the dairy legislation of the state perfected.

As these several institutions became well established and separate phases of the industry passed from infancy to lusty strength, such as those represented by cheese makers, butter makers, and pure-bred breeders, the association gladly turned over these special activities, keeping in mind its special mission of urging dairymen to keep better cows, give them better care, feed them more intelligently, handle their products to better profit, and protect the dairy market from fraudulent imitations.

Through all these years the association has kept close to the man on the farm, and its annual meetings have been held in those districts where it was felt the influence of the association would most largely promote the gospel of the dairy cow. The large centers of population were avoided, and it has gone out into the highways and byways of the state, into sections both well-settled and pioneer, to preach better cows, better methods, and more enlightened dairying as the means to an end,—more enlightened living.

In 1906 the first cow testing association was organized in this state through the efforts of the Wisconsin Dairymen’s Association, and to this work the major parts of the funds of the association have been devoted—indeed so great has been the demand for this work that for the past four years the association has omitted publication of its annual report as it was believed that such funds as were available might best be employed in the cow testing work. Marked success has crowned our efforts, for today Wisconsin leads all states by a good margin in the number of associations and number of cows on test.