CONDITION OF THE CHEESE FACTORIES AS I HAVE FOUND THEM.

PETER ZUMKEHR, TRAVELING CHEESE INSTRUCTOR OF SOUTHERN WISCONSIN.

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen:

The subject assigned to me by our worthy Secretary is “Conditions of Cheese Factories as I Have Found Them.” Permit me to add “And Improvements Needed,” so my subject is “Conditions of Our Cheese Factories at Present, and Improvements Needed.”

You would be disappointed if I would let this opportunity slip by without whipping you. I am not going to whip you very hard, but I am going to whip you hard enough so you can feel it.

I began my work as instructor last year in April and have been employed until the first of December. During that time I visited cheese factories almost daily, and in summer sometimes I had so much work that I was requested to work even on Sundays. The complaint was mostly bad milk.

The conditions of our cheese factories have the last few years changed materially. The old wooden, leaky and rotten floors are no more in existence, the malarious slush and mud puddles formerly very frequently met with on account of no drainage, have disappeared, and most factories have
now an underground drainage in place where, a few years ago, a man found a row of from 15 to 20 whey barrels all sunk in ground and no attempt was made to clean them out. Today you will find that a row of shade trees is planted in their place. The whey tank is in many instances inside the building and is kept clean. There is also a check-pump for the even distribution of the whey attached to it.

Curing rooms have been enlarged and cement floors are put in them. The cellar is also in some cases connected with the underground drainage. Steam boilers have to a large extent taken the place of the old smoky and so often condemned fireplace, and are now the rule instead of the exception.

Steam engines, separators, cream ripening vats, combined butter churns and workers are very frequently used in our factories. Ice houses are being built and filled every spring with ice.

A number of factories that are making the soft type of cheese have also begun to use a lactic ferment culture.

But one thing is lacking yet, a ceiling in the making room, and screen doors and windows are, in my opinion, of just as much importance as any of the above mentioned improvements, but I am sorry to say I very seldom find them. Many of the making rooms are filled with millions of flies in the summer time, and cheesemakers, in order to be clean and to make a clean product, are forced to wash the utensils before using them although they were washed clean right after they were used, and swarms of flies get tangled up in the milk and cream.

A great mistake was made when the factories were first built. They were built too small and they are too numerous. It's a sad mistake to think we can have a factory every mile or so, or at every crossroads, properly built and thoroughly equipped with the best of machinery necessary for the manufacture of first-class cheese. In my opinion there
are but few model cheese factories in Southwestern Wisconsin. If we would stop to consider the cost of all these small factories and then figure the cost of one large model factory centrally located, we would quickly see that our figures would all be in favor of the larger one. Figure then the skilled labor that could be employed with this or less money than is expended in curing at the proper temperature which can only be obtained in a model factory. A great mistake was made in selecting the place to build the factory. In many places we will find the old cheese factory stands on a piece of ground that is almost worthless for any other purpose, but of course it was good enough for a cheese cellar. In many places we find that the cellar is dug into a sand hill where digging was very easy.

A central location, good water supply and good drainage are, in my opinion, all important factors to consider before building. I will not speak on the construction of factories, much has been written on this subject, and anything I might say would not add to them, but I will say that our average curing room is most unfit for the curing of cheese and these curing rooms are, in many instances, responsible for the poor quality of cheese that is placed on the market.

I have entertained some strong views along the lines of model curing rooms for the past two years, but without much success I am very sorry to say. The answer that I got was mostly this: So long as we can sell our cheese over the shelves and get the same price for the good cheese as we do for the poor, what is the use of going to the expense and build such curing rooms; and furthermore, if cheese goes out as young as it has lately we hardly ever get our present curing rooms full. I know of an instance where Swiss cheese was shipped out not over five weeks old. I think this method of buying cheese is entirely wrong and out of place. Cheesemakers as well as patrons get careless and pay less attention to their work. Such careless and crazy
buying of the cheese has brought about a poorer class of maker. The patrons, when hiring a cheesemaker, pay more attention to the price that a man asks than to his ability or skill as a maker, and as a result we find that some makers only work four or five months as helper and the next season he represents a cheese factory himself because he offered to work cheap.

In my opinion this careless method of buying has brought about this condition. I claim and I believe I am justified in doing so, that no man, no matter how clever or intelligent, ever became proficient in cheesemaking in one season, no, nor in two.

The can of milk is an important subject and the best methods for caring for it are none too good. However, the most mistakes are made by the patron in this very important work. It is a bad mistake to expect to have good milk when dirty, sour whey is left standing in the can all day. Cheesemakers are sometimes troubled with poor milk early in the spring or early in the fall. The trouble arises mostly from one careless patron who expects the milk to be sweet and wholesome when he did not properly care for it the night before. Some cheesemakers also have a practice of accepting milk at the factory knowing it to have been rejected at the neighboring factory as unfit for cheese. Such a cheesemaker, in order to obtain a little patronage, puts a premium on uncleanness and has no one to blame for his losses but himself.

From the foregoing you will see that conditions in our cheese factories have been improved extensively, and indeed some very expensive improvements have been made. But much remains to be done yet. We have not yet reached anything like perfection, not by any means. There are yet hundreds of cheese factories that are not as they should be, and there is very great room for improvement all along the line. We must admit we have made mistakes and no doubt
will make more of them, but you are assembled here now for no other purpose that I can see than to learn wherein you are mistaken and whereby you can improve, and when this convention is ended you shall go home with a grim determination to do your share in the good work of not only putting Wisconsin on top as the greatest cheese-producing state in the world, but also to do your part in keeping her there. Acknowledge that this best can be done by a hearty co-operation among cheese makers and patrons.

I thank you.