CO-OPERATION BETWEEN CHEESE MAKER AND PATRONS

By A. C. SCHMIDT, Wausau, Wis.

Five years ago if you met one man out of a hundred and you asked him what is cooperation, he would have admitted he didn't know anything about it, and yet cooperation is not a new term. In the old country it has been known for sixty years. It is what built up Germany, England, France, Sweden and it was introduced into this country and then suddenly the war broke out and the term became a commercial term, and today you can hardly pick up a paper that you don't meet that word.

What is cooperation? If you take the direct analysis of the word it means working together. I don't care whether you take it in that sense or in the sense of making life between yourselves and your neighbors better. The packer has been ahead of you gentlemen for a long time. He organized whether he was in the city of New York or at Plymouth. They all work together. They didn't call it co-operation, they called it Packers' Association. The railroads got together and they regulated their business. Then they formed a big organization or a trust, but it was cooperation for themselves, only.

We are getting to the point where we say we want some of this cooperation, working together, but we don't want it for the packers exclusively. What we want when the thing is operated is that there is a living and a little bit better one in this whole movement for all of us. We don't want a mere existence for nine-tenths of the people and an immense wealth for one-tenth.

I am just going into the history of cooperation. About sixteen years ago, some of the older men probably remember those times when we sold oats for 15 cents a bushel, a bunch of farmers met in Indiana, in Indianapolis, and they organized a farmers association, a cooperative association. That was really the first actual cooperation in the United States. But they did much as you are doing here. They met together and they passed a bunch of dandy resolutions, and they went home. Fine! All papers published a lot of it. Most of them thought the farmers had gone nutty. The farmers worked, and the corn prices remained as they were. The winter went by and they had another session and they picked up those resolutions and they looked pretty good and they passed them over again and they went home. They did that for four or five years. Every year they met they brought out these same resolutions. Finally they woke up to the situation that they were in same position that they were in before. We began to cooperate, to establish our business,
to get together, to buy and sell together and work together on legislation, and we began getting results.

Gentlemen, you people have had all kinds of conventions, and yet when you look at the net results today, how much better off is the average cheese maker than he was twenty years ago? I maintain you are worse off today as a class than in those days. I said to one cheese maker who got up at half past four because the milk began coming in soon after that, the last ones coming at ten o'clock, and he would work along and finally about eight or nine o'clock he would finish up. I said, "Bill, what do you get for this?" He said, "Nothing if I do it, and hell if I don't." You are in the position between two mill stones. You are being ground by your patrons on the one side and you are ground by the buyers on the other side, and between the two they grind you in a pretty fine mill.

It is easy to talk along these lines, but the question is how are you going to remedy it. That is what you are meeting in convention for, and the way to do that is for you people to effect an organization. I want to just tell you this. Gentlemen, with the individual standing alone, if he is the best cheese maker on earth and not a very good organizer, he can accomplish nothing. There is many a territory in which there is a good cheese maker, a man who has learned his business, a man who studies and turns out a fine product, and yet he is not getting the returns because somebody has got a helper who has learned a little of the business and who is willing to jump in any minute, take his factory away from him. There he is for the simple reason he is not organized. Your farmers have succeeded through cooperation, your railroads have succeeded, your steel trust has succeeded and even your school ma'am's have succeeded. You know some years ago we used to pay any kind of a wage to a school ma'am. Some would pay $5 a month and another one would come in for $18 a month. Finally these teachers got together and they saw by their own agencies they couldn't get far, so they finally passed a law that a teacher cannot accept less than a certain amount. They are all getting it now. They have got a minimum wage established, and you men who two years ago were making 1½ cents a pound, today getting 2½ cents a pound you are not making as much money now as you were then.

That is how I became thoroughly interested in the cheese matter. I never made a pound of cheese in my life. I tell you I have worked with all these different games and looked into it and I have been all my life a cooperative man. They got me to do some work about figuring costs. I went and called on about a thousand cheese factories and began figuring costs, and out of that thousand—that was two or three years ago—I found not more than ten that were actually making money. The others were playing even; if they were charging themselves a salary, they weren't making anything on their investment. If they were making anything on their investment
they and their whole family had been working for nothing. Some places I found where the cheese maker and his family had been working all year for nothing and had been paying two or three hundred dollars to his patrons for the privilege of making cheese. Some doctors disagreed and some said that the farmer was a better man and some said that the ordinary city laboring man was a better man. You know how doctors are. They go to the bottom of it, sometimes way through a person. They got in a hundred farmers and a hundred average city working men and they examined them. If anything the farmer was probably a little bit stronger physically than the city man. This is only half the game. You have got to go farther than that. You have got to examine your muscle. Muscle alone doesn’t count. So they called them back again and when they got all through with them they reported. They voted the farmers brains were far better than the city man’s for the simple reason they were perfectly fresh and had never been used.

Now, then, supposing instead of those doctors calling in farmers they had called a hundred cheese makers what do you suppose the result would have been? I am afraid they would have made up their minds those brains had been in cold storage all their lives. You work too hard and you think too little. The way the business has been you have been forced to work from early to late and you haven’t had time to read your own papers, you haven’t had time to use your brains. What I am after in the work of the cheese industry is that you fellows save a little of the elbow grease and use a little of the gray matter of your heads. It will be to your benefit and the benefit of your patrons, the farmers whom I represent when I come to you here.

The minute you organize any line of men those men are coming together for mutual protection, for mutual betterment, and as a result they produce a better class of men, they produce a better product at a better price and you get more. Henry Ford says $5.00 a day is the lowest wage he will pay his men and they are doing two-thirds more work than they were when they were getting $2.00 a day and working fourteen hours a day. They are using less muscle and more brains.

When you have an organization you, as an organization, can treat with your patrons. You can get together and demand that a man who produces quality cheese can get more for his work. The competitor of yours who produces a poor cheese is getting the same price as the man who is making the finest cheese. Why? For the simple reason that the boys have been working and not organizing or thinking on the game. I know how it used to be with us before we had our shipping association. The man who makes a poor quality cheese is getting the same price as the man who makes the best quality. You are not selling your cheese on quality, not at all.

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We can talk about the rotten conditions, we can talk about the troubles we are having, but the thing we want is a remedy. What I am putting up to you is this, form a regular cheese makers organization. Call it a union, if you please, but put a union label on it, and do not permit the man who cannot make quality cheese to use that label. You will find that all the cheese makers will strive to get that label on their product, because he can't get as much money for it unless it has that label. Everybody is after the money. The trouble is most of the factories have existed up to the present time, have gotten along as best they could, they run a farm on the side.

The state of Wisconsin is founded, resting with all its pillars on the cheese industry of the state. It is therefore of the utmost importance that the people of this state get together to conserve this industry and make it a paying proposition, and it is necessary that you men who are in the game develop the necessary backbone to stand up for your rights, to form an organization that demands things, that is not afraid of getting kicks and knocks. When you do that thing you are going to be fit. The man who is uniting with five thousand other men has a lot of power if he is willing to use it and stand by his fellow men.

It has taken us three thousand years to get the idea that if we stick together we will have power through our heads, and we are just beginning to realize that in cooperating there is an immense power.

Mr. Filz has been working his best to get an organization. What power has Mr. Filz alone unless you get back of his movement like one great big county, and what affects Manitowoc county at the present time will affect the other counties. Don't wait until the thing comes up to your throat, but help the boys where it is on them, help them prevent it getting at their throats so that it can't get to yours, and you can only do that by organizing and reading the signs of the times and opposing matters in plenty. Why do the doctors elect members to the legislature of the state? Why do the lawyers go down there; why does big business send representatives there? Are there any cheese makers down at Madison? Any cheese makers at Congress? Not so you could notice it. A few farmers are getting there and they are gradually waking up to the fact that they have got to have representation and they are putting a regular lobby there, and they are getting results. It is time you men get a committee that goes after your legislature. It is cheaper to go down in your pocket for five or ten dollars than it is to sell your factory for five or ten thousand dollars loss.

Remember you are cooperating with the farmer and every cheese maker must become the leader in his own community. You must not be afraid to discuss politics. You must not be afraid to be in favor of or opposed to a bill which is up before the legislature. What a power you men might have. You come together with the farmers of the state. But if you took the time to post yourselves, if you
took the time to follow the directions and keep the matter before you all the time with a word here and there, you would be educating your people up to a point, and when you wanted action you could get it immediately, defeating the whey cream bill or the oleomargarine bill. You would have the whole body of farmers right in line with you. I would advocate holding meetings with your patrons. Don't act as though you were a kind of a hired man. Change your ways. Get out and become the leader. It will take a fight in the beginning, but it won't last very long if you keep at it.

One of our people went out to California to visit a relative who had moved out there and the relative took him around and said, "I want to show you this beautiful state. There is nothing like it. Did you ever see such a magnificent climate,—and the sunset. Look how the corn grows," and he went on and on in that way. The other man listened a while and then he said, "I don't see it is any different out here than it is over there in Wisconsin. This soil doesn't compare with ours, the grass isn't any greener and the sun sets in Wisconsin just as it does here and the fleas don't bite me nearly as much in Wisconsin as in California." The relative said, "By golly, I don't know but you are right, but everybody began talking about it and they talked it so much that at last I began to believe it and have been talking it ever since too." It won't take long for you to get the farmer to see that his interests and yours are identical, that any bill that will help you people will help him, if you people believe it yourselves and keep on talking it. No matter if they do call you a crank. Be convinced yourself as to what you want and the whole bunch of you agree on it and then keep driving toward it and it won't be long before you get the whole state organized and you will get your legislature.

What are you men doing about House Bill 7338 that is before the House at the present time? That is the oleomargarine bill as it is introduced, and it is such a little bill and it means so awfully much. It is entitled "A bill to reduce the tax on oleomargarine."

You didn't know that was before the House, and do you know they have got votes. The oleomargarine bill was defeated last year with a majority of six. They have plenty of votes, unless you men succeed in changing some, to pass that bill. What does it mean? That will hurt the butter men. It won't hurt the cheese, will it? Don't you believe it. It is going to permit them to sell it in place of butter. It will force down the prices of butter and you people will be hurt by the passage of that bill the same as the butter men because the vile oleomargarine even at 31 cents is expensive.

Don't you see how we must get together to protect ourselves? Here comes in the point of cooperating with your patrons. Your patron is interested; he will find his butter fat prices dropping, he will have to go and get rid of his dairy herds. He will find his farm running down for lack of fertilizer. Why not take these things in hand and form an active organization,—not one such as this but an
organization that the men will actually organize for their own benefit, where it will be ready to go and watch the passage of laws and defeat them where they are detrimental. You will even go into the market game, and the Lord only knows how far you will go, but you must make a start. The ordinary cheese maker has been just hanging on. He has not been able to have the necessary nerve, and he is now in the position where it takes dynamite to help him get out of the rut.

We could continue along this line for a good long while, but I don't want to do that because I don't want to tire you out. I want you to get to work on some of these real things. Are there any of those cheese makers from near Waukesha present who have organized a union out there? That is the first start that is being made in that line.

Mr. Noyes: Have you a copy of the 'skim milk bill that is going to come up this winter?

Mr. Schmidt: I have not. There are a number of other bills that are going to come up that are of vital importance to your industry. Appoint a committee and come across with the necessary expense. Compel them to act and every one of you get back of them, because you will find they will need your support.

In closing I just want to ask you to get to the plan of working together and talking to your patrons, explaining to them. Your patron often thinks you are getting rich because he doesn't know. I would enjoy being the cheese maker and calling my patrons together and showing how much money I was making, and you are also going to wake up to the immense surprise to yourself that you aren't making anything. They tell the story that originally the mules didn't know enough to use their heels and they tried to fight a lot of wolves. One old mule said, "Boys, we are keeping our heads apart and we are forgetting our heels. Let's get our heads together and our heels out on the outside," and they kicked the stuffing out of those wolves.

I am going to call on this gentleman now.

Member: In Dodge and Washington counties we have tried to organize a union. Of course we haven't very many members yet, we have just started. We have tried to get all we could. We really think it is necessary, because everything has gone up, so we must have more wages too. That is the way we thought.

Prof. Lee: How long have you been organized?

Member: Just about two months.

Prof. Lee: Why didn't you separately each one go after your people and demand more wages?

Member: Because they wouldn't pay it.

Prof. Lee: How do you find things, is it working?

Member: It is working pretty good as far as we got. One man would say, "I will pay it if the other fellow does," so we thought we must have a union to make them all pay it. There are some paying
good wages now and there are others who get their men a good deal cheaper.

**Prof. Lee:** Have you any questions to ask the gentleman?

**Member:** What price?

**Member:** We have been getting at present 70 cents for brick, 75 for brick, and 85 for Swiss block.

**Mr. Schmidt:** You see what this man can do. We have got to do those things. All other industries have been compelled to. Those farmers in Manitowoc county who are fighting the condenseries at the present time aren't doing it because they want to.

**Member:** At 80 cents a hundred can a man make a living? How many hundred pounds of cheese would a man have to make to make a living?

**Prof. Lee:** How many do you estimate? What do you say Mr. Aderhold?

**Mr. Aderhold:** Of course there are a great many different conditions. Of course in some factories they make a cheese of a small type which requires a great deal more work. In some factories they skim the whey and in some factories they don't. The gentleman over there pays the rent of the factory probably and there is the supplies and the labor. In this case they furnish only the labor.

**Member:** A man can go out and get $60 a month on a farm and his board, and I can hire out ten men tomorrow if I had them at that price. Cheese makers must be good men, else they are not wanted.

The man at 80 cents a hundred, paying his own board, isn't making half that.

**Mr. Schmidt:** I will tell you this. There were many cheese makers that were getting $30 a month, and not even that, but how much they are making today I don't know, but the idea of this gentleman is all right. They are getting together, and if that stimulates conditions you are getting started. I want to see you men work to the point where you can use your brains and make better Wisconsin cheese and people pay the price for it, and the men will make money and as a result the farmers also.