of the Dairy Division in the Department of Agriculture an Independent Bureau and we call on our representatives in congress to take hold of this most needed work. Respectfully submitted,

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Committee.

HISTORY OF THE SWISS CHEESE INDUSTRY IN WISCONSIN.

THOMAS LUCHSINGER, Before the Wisconsin Dairymen’s Convention, Monroe, Wisconsin.

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen of the Convention:—The subject that I have for my theme this morning is not so interesting to the people of Green county as it might be to others who have never heard of it, or if they have heard of it, never had a clear idea what it is. Certainly, if the history of the state of Wisconsin should be written, one of the most interesting chapters in that book would be about the foreign cheese industry of Wisconsin. When I say the “foreign” cheese industry, I mean especially the Swiss cheese, Brick and Limburger. We do manufacture in this country other kinds, the Brie, Neufchatel cream cheese and others too numerous to mention, but not in such masses as the Swiss, Brick and Limburger.

In order to give you a clear understanding of the origin of our Swiss cheese industry in the state of Wisconsin, I will have to go back to the old country where it originated thousands of years ago in Switzerland.

In Switzerland they have what you call the Alps. We call them the Alps in a more common sense, that is, for the reason that there are pastures on what we would call in this country the foot hills of the mountains. Way up, about four, five, six, yes, twelve miles from a village, up on the slopes of those foothills there are pastures. They contain perhaps from four hun-
dred to six hundred acres of land, some of it pretty nice land, but too far away for tilling and some of it is hilly, stony, and affords good pasture, some of it better for goats than for cows, for a goat will still jump where a cow cannot walk.

Now, those pastures every year are put up at auction by the community—they are communal property, and they are put up at auction to the highest bidder, and generally three, four or five men form a partnership and they bid at this auction and rent those pastures, and when they have not cows enough of their own, one of them perhaps owns four or six cows, another three and another perhaps two, and a good many own but one, but they go about during the winter and rent those cows at a certain rental, and then about the middle of May they go on what they call the first terrace of the Alps. These Alps are in terraces, one above the other, the first terrace, the second and the third. The lower one is called the third, then the next is called the middle and the other the upper. Up to these mountains they go during the summer, bring those cows and milk them, and the evening's milk is slightly skimmed.

Their factories are usually built over a cold spring; they always find a place where they can put one of their cheese factories' huts, as they call them, over a spring or a water course if near by. In this they put their evening's milk to stay until morning, then in the morning they skim it very slightly and take that and the morning's milk home to manufacture cheese. The cream is manufactured into butter. These things have to be carried down four, five, six and sometimes twelve miles; these men have something like a peddler's pack on the shoulder, made in the form of a chair. On that they load two, three and four loads of milk; one on top of the other, weighing sometimes 240 or more pounds. It is wonderful to see them with their sticks in their hands jumping from one stone to another. You would think an ordinary man's legs would break, but they jump from one block to another with a load of 240 to 250 lbs. on their backs, and go to the village and unload themselves and take back what little they need, and that little they need is not coffee, not sugar; it is merely some bread and some flour; that
is about all they carry back along with some of the things that they need for cheesemaking, and that is their life.

In the fall of the year, about the middle of September, about six weeks during the year they are on the upper terrace; then they come back to the middle terrace and toward fall they come to the lower terrace and very often they have snow, but they always have a little hay to feed the cows if the ground is too much covered with snow, and then later on they come down to this ground and are there for the entire winter.

Now, some of these people, who were doing this thing, settled in 1845 in New Glarus, a town about eighteen miles north of here, and those of you who know that country will realize that they were looking for some mountains. I believe they would have died if they had got out on the level prairie, although some of them have got used to even that. In that country they could have their hills, their water and there were about 140 of those persons and among them were a few cheesemakers. They were poor men, who did not own cows, but they were industrious. They came there and after awhile they would get one cow, and then after another while they had two cows, and a little while longer three cows.

A man would go and work for an American until he could buy a cow, and so, after a while, every one owned at least one cow, and sometimes two. In 1846 and 1847 more of them came and they had a little money especially there were two men by the name of Elmer, they came from Elm, and they were practical cheesemakers. They came to New Glarus and they found everything all right for their undertaking, and they began to work and began buying cows, and by the way, let me remark without any disparagement of Gov. Hoard or anybody else, they were as good judges of a dairy cow as anybody need to be. Those men certainly knew their business as anybody will tell you who knew them.

They went to work and bought a few cows and kept adding to them, though I think the highest number did not exceed ten, but very soon they began to hanker after the fleshpots of Egypt, or rather the cheese of Switzerland, and they commenced to manufacture it. They had no utensils, but they utilized what they
had and fixed up other things, and they made a rather large cheese weighing from twenty-five to forty pounds.

Very soon they manufactured more than they could use, more than they could sell in the market there at New Glarus, and they naturally began to look around to find out whether there wasn’t anybody in the towns around who ate cheese. You all know that Swiss cheese is a very nice cheese, but still it has a peculiar odor about it, and the Americans didn’t know what it was. It was a good deal like a hickory nut; the outside is sometimes bitter while the inside kernel is sweet. But soon their neighbors found out what the cheese was and they bought it to eat, but not to any great extent. It was mostly the German people who knew what Swiss cheese was from way back in their own country. There were more of these people down at Madison and they went to the Freeport country, and even as far as Milwaukee for their market, and finally there was quite a little market.

Now, there was only a small sprinkling of men who were able to make that cheese, for Swiss cheesemaking is an art. A good many Limburger cheesemakers tried to go into it, but I have never seen yet a Limburger or Brick cheesemaker that could make a success of the Swiss cheese business unless he took an apprenticeship in it. It is an art and it has to be learned. There is some mystery about it and those men were experts, some of them, and others became experts, and they made good goods, fully as good as we have nowadays. Still there were very few of those men that were making money; they sold their cheese for 15 or 16 cents a pound and their neighbors were making butter out of their milk, and some of them became wealthy. I doubt if those men realized more than from $8 to $12 per cow during the summer, while others got from $30 to $35 and even $40 per cow out of their herds. They saw that, but they couldn’t help themselves, they didn’t know how. It was not until 1873, when the great panic came and we had such a tight money market, a heavy, strong crop of chinch bugs and everything else—it became imperative for those men to do something else and when the misery was at its height, help was seen. Two men came from the East and proclaimed to these
people the gospel of the dairy business. These men said to these cheesemakers: "Here, you, who have ten cows, or eight cows, or six, why don’t you get together and build a factory, and we will buy this milk of you and manufacture it into cheese."

Those men wanted to see the money; they hadn’t the confidence then that they have now in the dairy business, but they were told: "We will pay you from 55 to 60 cents a hundred for your milk, for all you will bring to our factory, and we will make it into cheese and we will turn it off and return you that money when we sell the cheese."

All right, it was done and the people commenced to see that there was money in it. Those who did not go into it saw that these people that sold their milk at 55 to 65 cents were getting money; they were wearing better clothes; they were commencing to pay off their little debts and everybody else wanted to go the same way, not only because there was some money in it, but they saw that their neighbors’ land, by keeping more cattle upon it, was getting more productive and they could naturally keep more cattle. Factories sprang up at every corner.

Now then, we have a panic again, I think it was in 1877. The production of this foreign cheese—and I am speaking of foreign cheese,—by 1877 or 1878, had grown so strong that the supply exceeded the demand, almost twofold. Cheese accumulated on the hands of these milk buyers; there was competition, and a good many of them went to the wall. A good many have reason enough never to forget those years. When those men went to the wall, the farmers commenced to see that they had to bear the loss, they could not get from the cheesemakers any money for their milk and by and by they commenced to argue, if that is the case we can just as well go to work and keep our own milk. They had found out by that time that when there was a gain, the milk buyer did not divide up with them, he didn’t go down in his pocket and say, “Here, gentlemen, I have made a dollar out of this milk, and it is nothing but fair that I should give you your share,” but when the loss came the farmer had to bear it.

You will all agree with me that the man who keeps his own milk as well as the man who buys it has an interest in taking
care of it, and so in co-operative factories that same rule holds good. The cheesemaker dares to turn back milk from the factory to a man who has dirty cans and in a co-operative factory they would insist on his doing it.

I don’t know whether folks are getting more honest than they used to be since we had the Dairy and Food Commission, but I think a lot of us have found out that it doesn’t pay to be found out. Nobody likes that.

Now, a lot of factories were started up, co-operative and otherwise. We have now in almost each corner of a section, and sometimes in two corners, a cheese factory in this county. It is hard to give you any kind of an estimate of how many cheese there are and harder still to say how many Swiss cheese factories there are, for the reason that what may be a cheese factory today may be a Limburger factory tomorrow, and we can’t keep track of them unless we keep a regular cheese census.

It is just as hard to get at the number of pounds that they have manufactured, unless we do that very same thing. I tried very hard for years to get some kind of approximate idea and the best I could find out was that the territory which is covered by our Southwest Dairy Association, which comprises pretty near the entire foreign Swiss cheese industry—that in that territory we have somewhere in the neighborhood of 400 factories of all kinds, and that the income from those factories is about in the neighborhood of $4,250,000; if anything, that estimate is too low. There is an industry that brings in that much money and I think it would not extend 30 miles either way, from a central point.

The income of Green county for every man, woman and child is $108.17. We have about 23,000 inhabitants in this county; we have more cows, by the way, than we have inhabitants, and—I don’t know—perhaps it is a good thing. We have 23,000 inhabitants and each of them gets $108.17. Anybody can readily see that there is no business which pays better, in this county, at least, than the dairy business.

At that time we handled all round hoops; Swiss cheese in any other form was not to be thought of, but a few years back they commenced to manufacture what you call block Swiss cheese.
The block Swiss cheese is manufactured exactly the same as the
other, out of the same milk and in the same press, I think. The
block cheese can be made in a vat, but the round, globe cheese
must be made in a kettle. The block cheese, instead of putting
it in a round hoop, is put in molds, the pressure is a little differ-
ent, a great deal similar to the brick cheese process. It is a
handier cheese, though it is not quite as good a cheese; it is
handier for the family and for small dealers. We are now
manufacturing cheeses that weigh 150 to 200 pounds and over.
If you want first-class, genuine A No. 1 Swiss cheese, you must
go to New York and ask for cheese that was made in Green
county, Wisconsin, a year ago, and they are not good in less
time than that. They will give it to you all right but they will
say it was imported cheese. You just turn it over and you will
see the brand of some man here in Green county. They will
sell it to you for imported cheese and you can't tell the differ-
ence. I don't know why we can't do that in this county. Per-
haps it is because the cheese factories are small, the cellars are
smaller than they ought to be and they can't take care of all the
cheese they manufacture; they haven't sufficient room, and be-
sides they need the money, and for that reason the cheese must
go before it is fairly ripe. That is where the one great draw-
back is for our cheese industry that we sell our cheese before
it is in proper condition.

Ex-Gov. Hoard: That is true of all the cheese made in Wis-
consin.

Mr. Luchsinger: But it is more true of Swiss cheese than
any other cheese, because Swiss cheese is absolutely not fit to
eat until it gets up to a certain point of ripeness.

Ex-Gov. Hoard: When is Limburger ripe?

Mr. Luchsinger: Most any time, and the worst of it is when
it is too ripe it is worthless. But Swiss cheese ought to have
a certain time to ripen and that is what we do not give it; I
will say at least four months from the time that it is first made.
It does not become ripe enough for shipping until then, and it
ought not to be cut before it is at least eight months old, and the
longer you keep it from that time the better—of course there
is a certain limit. A year or a year and a half is better.
Now then, we have shown you how it originated, how Green county got its first start in this direction. Other counties are now also making Swiss cheese; Winnebago county is a close second.

Ex-Gov. Hoard: They have one started in Barron county.

Mr. Luchsinger: Yes, people have gone all over the state from this county of Green trying to make cheese elsewhere. When these people came from Switzerland, these old Swiss folks had no idea that they would ever be their competitors, but they are to some extent. Switzerland has no greater competitor than its own children, here in Monroe and in the surrounding counties, and they are afraid of them; they can manufacture it as well; they have the country to do it in; they have the same conditions in the soil. Swiss cheese must have a lime rock foundation soil. They have tried to make it where there was no foundation at all, and they have tried to make it on gravel lands, Rock county and through Jefferson; they have to have that certain kind of soil which this country has. Those barren hills up in New Glarus and Electa, all through out to Burlington and Lafayette county is the kind to make Swiss cheese in. They do not know what they have; they don’t appreciate for a minute a meeting like this and what may come of it to them, or there would be more of them here.

Ex-Gov. Hoard: I want to know if there has been any attempt made by you farmers here to study or determine the effect of the shipping away of all this fertility from their soil. The old cheese districts of New York have gone down tremendously in their fertility, and about five dollars of nitrogen is taken off the farm in the milk of every cow that makes 4,000 pounds. Has there been any attempt here to study that question, to know whether the old farms are still as fertile, are retaining their fertility or increasing their fertility?

Mr. Luchsinger: This is the very point I was going to make before I got through, and that is, that it has increased the number of cattle that we have here, but there is another condition attached to it; we don’t want to let the compost heap lie in front of the barn. You must put it out where it belongs, and one of the clauses in every lease which I draw is that they must
haul out their compost and spread it where it is most needed. That is just as imperative as paying the rent. We know, because it has been demonstrated, that the land that would not yield anything thirty years ago will now bring the heavy crops of corn, while some of it is too heavy for oats, or some of the small crops. They have to plant it in corn, year after year, in order to keep the fertility down, it is too fertile.

Ex-Gov. Hoard: In Herkimer county, New York, I can buy land today for $25 an acre which fifty years ago was worth $70, because the fertility has run way down.

Mr. Luchsinger: In the Brick cheese manufacture we have strong competition, but as to Limburger cheese we compete with the world; we not only manufacture the most, we manufacture the best.

Ex-Gov. Hoard: It is a very strong industry here.

Mr. Luchsinger: Well, it is naturally strong; we have got so used to it that we like it, and when we go elsewhere and the odor of Limburger comes to our nostrils, we think of one dear Green county and it brings home to our hearts. Before five years ago Limburger was an unknown quantity in the United States, but now, out in the Panhandle district down in Texas, up in Maine, and way out in Washington and south to Florida, you will find our Limburger cheese today in every delicatessen place and in every high class saloon (so I am told), and we have no reason to be afraid but that we will keep right on, but the Swiss cheese industry is absolutely our own. Limburger has been and will be made elsewhere; Swiss cheese may be made elsewhere, but it cannot be made and will hardly be made by any but Swiss or the descendants of Swiss.