

the DAIRY PARLOR

then & now

SCIENCE & EDUCATION

by Ray Patacca, INTERPRETATION AND EDUCATION MANAGER

MORE THAN 20 YEARS AGO, Lake Metroparks decided to preserve Lake County's rural heritage by showing people where their food comes from. A big part of our rural past is dairying, so Lake Metroparks staff worked to recreate that experience for visitors to the newly developing Farmpark. The concept of a visitor hand milking a cow was a novel approach for many farm museums. We also wanted to show how different breeds of cows were developed to produce milk, cream and meat.

Farmpark began with one Guernsey cow, Annabelle, who had just freshened. She was kept in the area now known as the Well Bred Shed. Farmpark's agricultural staff built a milking stand and took turns hand milking the cow with guests. Milk was gathered and fed to the pigs.

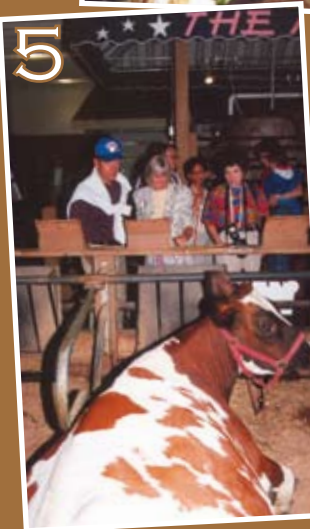
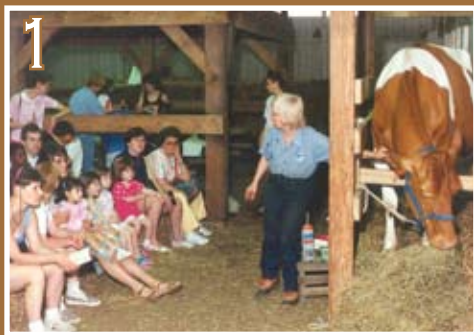
Hand milking quickly became the highlight of a Farmpark visit and the original makeshift milking stand became too small. With the addition of a Holstein cow from Lausin Farm in Ashtabula County, milking out a cow that produced eight to ten gallons of milk per day became burdensome. The need for a milking machine and permanent location for the dairy became evident.

In 1991, the dairy was moved to the east wing of the Visitor Center, the Well Bred Shed took the place of the milking stand and the milking stand temporarily moved to the Arena. Until the new dairy was finished, we set up straw bales for guests to sit on during the demonstrations.

The new milking parlor was designed to include space for six cows, a DeLaval milking machine, automatic waterers for the cows, a milk storage tank, a dairy processing room and bleachers to accommodate a large number of guests. The dairy herd was expanded with a Milking Shorthorn, a Milking Devon and an Ayrshire. This enabled us to interpret the importance of different breeds and allow the cows to be rotated for hand milking.

Now we had to find a dairy processing plant to take all of our milk. Since we allowed the public to milk our cows, the milk did not qualify as grade A milk for drinking. However, the milk is grade B and can be used for cheese making. For several years, milk was picked up twice weekly by the Middlefield Swiss Cheese Company until they upgraded their facility to handle only grade A milk. For a while, milk was sold to Misceli's Dairy but it now goes to Minerva Cheese Factory in Minerva, Ohio.

Today Farmpark's dairy looks similar to the original parlor built in 1991. Its most recent facelift occurred in 2007 when we added a metal ceiling, vinyl walls and new lighting. Almost every guest who visits the dairy milks a cow, makes cheese, separates cream and even helps to make ice cream. The dairy has grown into the "must do" attraction at Farmpark and has greatly contributed to our mission of agricultural education.



1. The dairy parlor's second location in the arena. Notice the straw bale seating. 2. The present dairy, under construction in 1991. 3. Today Farmpark milk is trucked to the Minerva Cheese Factory. Here our interpretive staff follows the milk through its production cycle. 4. The dairy processing room is used for cheese making and cream separating demonstrations. 5. In 1995, then Governor George Voinovich and his wife Janet visited the dairy. 6. Farmpark staff member Ann Petersen milks our first Holstein cow with the help of a young guest.