

# *The Decline of Women in Canadian Dairying*

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*Before the rise of the factory system for the production of cheese and butter, women were the main producers of these products in Canada. Initially production centred on providing for household consumption, but as markets improved women's dairying became an important source of income for farm families. While women remained in the industry as it expanded in its pre-industrial stage, they did not manage to develop large-scale capitalist enterprises as the industry moved from household craft production to more capital-intensive factory production. Instead, women's work in dairying tended to remain labour-intensive and confined to what could be performed within the household. The patriarchal structure of the household and the cultural assumptions about the nature of the sexual division of labour were the most significant factors leading to the decline of women's activity in this industry. But the government was not neutral in the process: its actions also contributed to the male domination of dairying.*

*Avant l'industrialisation de la production de fromage et de beurre, les femmes en étaient les principales productrices au Canada. À l'origine, la production visait essentiellement à satisfaire la consommation domestique, mais avec le développement des marchés, le travail des femmes dans ce secteur devint une source importante de revenu pour les familles agricoles. Bien qu'elles continuèrent à y participer pendant la phase pré-industrielle de l'expansion de l'industrie laitière, elles ne réussirent pas à mettre sur pied des entreprises de grande échelle lors du passage à la production industrielle fondée sur le gros capital. Leur participation prit alors la forme d'un travail intensif qui se limita aux tâches effectuées à domicile. La structure patriarcale des ménages et les préjugés culturels concernant la division du travail selon le sexe furent les facteurs les plus déterminants du déclin de la participation des femmes à cette industrie. Mais le gouvernement ne fut pas étranger à ce processus : son action contribua aussi à la domination masculine dans l'industrie laitière.*

One of the most productive and important aspects of women's farm work in Canada has been dairying. This, at least, was the case until the rise of the factory system in the production of dairy products. Before the first cheese factories were established Canadian farm women performed most of the actual dairy work and were primarily responsible for most dairy production in Canada. However, as various aspects of dairying moved from the farm to the factory, women's participation was gradually eliminated, particularly on farms which began to specialize in dairying. A variety of complex factors explains why this activity, which was controlled by women, was taken over by men as it moved from a household craft to factory production. The patriarchal structure of the household and the underlying assumptions about the nature of the division of labour between men and women were the most significant forces leading to male control of dairying as capital accumulation became a more important aspect of production. But these factors were reinforced by the economic and cultural forces peculiar to Canadian development and the tendency of governments to support only male efforts in the industry as it became "big business".

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The focus here is on the changes that occurred in dairying in the second half of the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth centuries in central Canada. Since Ontario and Quebec were major producers of dairy products in Canada and the first provinces to turn to factory production, most of the information will concentrate on the industry in these provinces. However, the experience of women as dairy producers in other provinces will also be elucidated. The development of factory dairying did not occur evenly throughout the country; rather, areas closest to large markets were affected first. Yet, the factors which brought about male control of the industry were common to all areas where the transformation to factory production occurred.

### I — DAIRYING AS WOMEN'S WORK

A few historians of Canadian dairying have acknowledged, but merely in passing, the significance of female labour before large-scale dairying developed. For example, J.A. Ruddick, in his history of Canadian dairying, says: "The work involved in making cheese and butter on the farm, which had been performed chiefly by women in the household, was taken over by men in the factories."<sup>1</sup> Robert Jones made a brief reference to the extent of women's involvement in dairying in *History of Agriculture in Ontario*, and Vernon Fowke acknowledged "farmers' wives [as] the craftsmen of farm dairies".<sup>2</sup> But for the most part historians have been absorbed in the market conditions of dairying and have been relatively uninterested in the labour aspects of production on the farm itself.<sup>3</sup> In large part this is a result of a preoccupation with transportation, technology and tariffs, but it is also due to the general tendency to examine issues of labour only when wages are paid.

Although there is infrequent reference to the sex of dairy workers in pre-nineteenth century records, such records as exist indicate that women as dairy workers were so common as not to merit specific mention. One example is the reaction of a priest visiting New France in 1734. He had no direct comment about women's dairying work, merely expressing dismay that female habitants who worked tending cows during the week wore lace and hoop skirts like ladies of fashion on Sunday.<sup>4</sup> Dairying as a commercial enterprise was slow to develop in New France and in the Maritimes. Most of what was produced was consumed by the household units themselves, but a limited market in which women were active existed even from the earliest days. An advertisement appearing in Halifax in 1776 indicates that dairying was considered a woman's speciality even for some slaves:

1. J.A. RUDDICK, "The Development of the Dairy Industry in Canada", in *The Dairy Industry in Canada*, ed. Harold A. INNIS (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1937), p. 44.

2. Robert Leslie JONES, *History of Agriculture in Ontario, 1613-1880* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1946), p. 102. Vernon FOWKE, *Canadian Agricultural Policy: The Historical Pattern* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1946), p. 213.

3. This invisibility of women in accounts of Canadian dairying has been noted by feminist historians. See Beth LIGHT and Veronica STRONG-BOAG, *True Daughters of the North* (Toronto: OISE Press, 1980), p. 2, and Susan TROFIMENKOFF and Alison PRENTICE, eds., *The Neglected Majority: Essays in Canadian Women's History* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977), p. 153.

4. W.J. ECCLES, *Canadian Society During the French Regime* (Montreal: Harvest House, 1968), p. 74.

Wanted to purchase, a Negro woman, about 25 or 30 years of age, that understands country work and the management of a dairy, she must be honest and bear good character. Enquire of printer.<sup>5</sup>

By the nineteenth century evidence of women as dairy producers is more plentiful. The most important sources are the accounts of the producers themselves, but observers and critics also frequently commented on women's work in this area. One of the most notable was "Agricola", a well-known critic of inefficient agricultural practices in the 1820s. In criticizing Nova Scotian women for abandoning the labours of the dairy, he accepted the notion that dairying was and ought to continue as women's work.<sup>6</sup> However, this tendency of women to abandon dairying was never noted further west and did not continue in the Nova Scotia communities he wrote about.<sup>7</sup> In 1861 James Croil, describing the farm family as a self-contained labour unit, referred to the dairy as the province of women. The "greater part of the labour of the farm in Canada is performed by the farmer himself, his sons and his daughters; the former managing all the out of doors operations, and the latter the dairy and domestic departments."<sup>8</sup> In his reference to dairying the farmer's wife was notably absent; however, Croil did emphasize that her chief role was that of administrator: "Whatever qualifications the farmer should have, mental or physical, all are agreed upon this point, that a *good wife* is indispensable. What is the aim of the husband to accumulate, it becomes the province of the wife to manage, and wherever we hear of a managing wife, we are sure to find a moneymaking farmer."<sup>9</sup>

However, most of the information about the type of dairying work performed by women, the amount of time spent on it, and its significance in relation to other farm work is the testimony of farm women and men themselves in their letters and diaries. These sources indicate that while dairying was not the exclusive occupation of farm women (as adults, children or servants) it consumed a considerable portion of many farm women's days. These personal testimonies are extensive and cover most settled areas of the country over long periods of time. While often the reference in a letter or a diary will refer merely to the milking chores or the amount of butter churned in a week, taken as a whole they point very clearly to subsistence-level dairying as the responsibility of females. Accounts which indicate a surplus in production tend to be even more explicit in indicating the importance of dairying to the whole farm operation and in showing that when dairying generated income, the income was recognized by the farm family as having been provided by female labour.

5. *Nova Scotia Gazette and Weekly Chronicle*, 23 May 1776, reprinted in *Pioneer and Gentlewomen of British North America, 1713-1867*, eds. Beth LIGHT and Alison PRENTICE (Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1980), p. 42.

6. John YOUNG, *The Letters of Agricola* (Halifax, 1822), p. ix.

7. By 1871 Nova Scotia had a substantial dairy industry. It produced about 10 percent of Canada's butter and about 18 percent of the country's homemade cheese. *Canada, Census*, 1871, vol. III, p. 20.

8. James CROIL, *Dundas, or A Sketch of Canadian History* (Montreal: B. Dawson and Son, 1861), p. 211.

9. *Ibid.*

## II — SIGNIFICANCE OF DAIRYING TO THE FARM ECONOMY

In *Wheat and Women* Georgina Binnie-Clark, a wheat farmer, explained the importance of dairy production to a farm that specialized in wheat. Her personal law of survival was that the successful farmer should never buy anything in the way of food either for livestock or for human needs. Whenever possible food should be raised on the farm and fresh meat and groceries should be obtained in exchange for dairy produce. Her two cows made a significant contribution to the farm economy: "I used all milk, cream and butter necessary in the house, and took several pounds of butter weekly to the Hudson Bay in exchange for household necessities."<sup>10</sup> In a speech to the Royal Colonial Institute in London, England, Binnie-Clark stressed both the precariousness of relying totally on wheat production and the essential role of dairying in farm operations. She spoke of the experience of "one of the best commercial women farmers (and her husband)" whose wheat crop on their farm near Lethbridge had been destroyed by hail. Disaster was averted only through their dairying. "They have proved their household expenditure to be covered by the dairy produce of three milch cows, and had at once bought six more. They were then making sixty pounds of butter a week, out of this produce they had bought sixty hens and were prepared to buy winter feed for their thirteen pigs."<sup>11</sup>

While Binnie-Clark's advice pertained specifically to western wheat farming in the early part of this century, the strategy of combining staple production, which was primarily male oriented, with subsistence farming, where women's productive efforts on the farm were concentrated, was common in Canada. The wild fluctuations in prices received for staples during the early stages of development<sup>12</sup> as well as the general unavailability of certain types of goods because of underdeveloped markets forced household units to maintain a significant level of self-sufficiency, particularly in foodstuffs. Dairying initially arose from the need of household units to safeguard against the multitude of uncertainties involved in production primarily for the export market and from the need to provide for the household. While providing for the household was the main requirement of women's farm dairying, that activity was also able in varying degrees to provide an income whenever a surplus was generated and a market existed. This income was often critical to the survival of the farm unit, both as a source for investment in initial staple production and as a means of continuing in years when the vagaries of the market or the climate made staple production unprofitable.<sup>13</sup>

10 Georgina BINNIE-CLARK, *Wheat and Women* (Toronto: University of Toronto, [1914] 1979), p. 128.

11 Georgina BINNIE-CLARK, address given to members of the Royal Colonial Institute, 8 April 1913, in *A Flannel Shirt and Liberty: British Emigrant Gentlemen in the Canadian West, 1880-1914*, ed. Susan JACKEL (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1982), p. 184.

12 For discussions of the instability of staple production, see H. Clare PENTLAND, *Labour and Capital in Canada, 1650-1860* (Toronto: James Lorimer and Company, 1981), pp. 177-78; Harold A. INNIS, "Unused Capacity as a Factor in Canadian Economic History", in *Essays in Canadian Economic History*, ed. Mary Q. INNIS (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1956), pp. 141-55; Daniel DRACHE, "Harold Innis and Canadian Capitalist Development", *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory*, 6 (Winter/Spring 1982): 36-38.

13 For a discussion of the importance of diversity in farm production in the Canadian west, see Max HEDLEY, "Independent commodity production and the dynamics of tradition", *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology*, 13 (1976): 413-21, in particular, p. 417, where he says, "the diversity

While dairying remained women's work it slowly grew from an industry which was confined to consumption within the producer's household to one which generated sufficient surplus to be a significant factor in the country's export market. But the process was a gradual one, and the expansion of dairying before factory production rarely involved the specialization of a specific farm unit.<sup>14</sup> Rather it was the result of increasingly larger numbers of isolated farm women producing surpluses for markets.

### III — CONDITIONS OF FEMALE DAIRYING

Early dairying in Canada was performed under difficult conditions which tended to limit farm dairying to small-scale, part-time work for farm women. One of the major disadvantages dairywomen faced as producers for the market was the poorly developed nature of the market itself. Because of the orientation of the economy toward staple exports, transportation facilities to encourage an integrated market internally were slow to develop.<sup>15</sup> In early settlements dairy products were scarce and since dairying was not the primary interest of the farm unit as a whole, the resources available for its use were poor. But problems with inadequate supply were less serious than those of proper methods of distribution, for such surpluses as were generated were redundant without a market for their distribution. Only with the growth of towns and settlements did the markets for dairy produce increase but even so the production techniques on farms did not change rapidly.

The development of dairying in Canada may well be typical of countries where land ownership is less concentrated and wage labour scarcer than in older countries. In the United States evidence also points to dairying as the work of individual women's efforts on farms before the factory system. This is particularly evident in mid-western areas where circumstances more closely resembled those found in Canada. There too women's dairying appears to have been restricted by limited markets and the tendency for the major effort on farms to have been directed toward staple production for export.<sup>16</sup> The limited nature of markets meant that dairy production and women's work in dairying in North America were very different from what occurred in Europe.<sup>17</sup> In England, for example, the large integrated

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of operations, in conjunction with virtual self-sufficiency in domestic consumption, offered some protection against unpredictable price fluctuations and the vulnerability of a single commodity to the effects of natural hazards."

14. In 1861 only one farmer in Dundas County specialized in dairying. See CROIL, *Dundas*, p. 202. Earlier Anna Jameson had remarked that in many parts of Upper Canada a dairy farm was so rare it was a curiosity. Cited in JONES, *Agriculture in Ontario*, p. 250.

15. See INNIS, *The Dairy Industry*, p. 4, for a discussion of the effect of staple production on the slow growth of dairying in Canada.

16. Eric E. LAMPARD, *The Rise of the Dairy Industry in Wisconsin: A Study in Agricultural Change, 1820-1920* (Madison: The State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1962), p. 23.

17. While little is known about the organization of women's farm dairying in the United States, it is clear that early markets in north-eastern states were more integrated and larger than in more sparsely settled areas. Joan M. Jensen estimates that by 1840 from 14 to 23 percent of the agricultural income of New England came from dairy production. The effect that this had on the structure of women's labour is still to be discovered. Joan M. JENSEN, "Cloth, Butter and Boarders: Women's Household Production for the Market", *Review of Radical Political Economics*, 12 (Summer 1980): 17. Many books on U.S. dairying refer to women as the producers of cheese and butter on farms, but do not examine the specific nature of the work. See, for example, Edward WIEST, *The Butter Industry in the*

markets and comparatively small land area stimulated the growth of large dairy farms well before production of dairy products moved to the factory.<sup>18</sup> Within this large-scale farm production dairying methods required much labour. Women not only tended cows and made cheese and butter, but were also primarily responsible for the entire management of the dairy business.<sup>19</sup> The occupation of dairymaid in Europe was a distinct, skilled, and frequently full-time job.<sup>20</sup> In Canada the dairymaid was a much less common occupation. Female servants worked at dairying in Canada, but most commonly this work was only part of the labour of a general domestic servant.<sup>21</sup> Occasionally, women were hired specifically for farm labour, but even then it was unlikely that the labour would be confined to dairying; normally the work would include such additional farm tasks as poultry raising and fruit and vegetable growing. So while dairying was a feminized industry in Canada, the dairymaid was virtually unknown.

The typical dairy farmer, at least until the 1870s, was the farm wife. Often she performed the work single-handed. In the winter the labour involved little more than feeding and caring for the cow, for not until the late 1890s was winter milking an accepted practice.<sup>22</sup> Sometimes even these winter activities would be taken over by the male farmer during the months when outdoor work could not be performed.<sup>23</sup> But for most of the year and certainly during the time when dairy production was possible, the labour of dairying was the responsibility of the farm woman. For many who came to the country as immigrants, in particular the "gentlewoman" from England, dairy work was a new skill which had to be acquired quickly and a variety of strategies were devised to overcome the most monotonous aspects of its labour. Mary O'Brien, for example, had the habit of churning butter with a copy of Milton in hand.<sup>24</sup> Even if only one or two cows were kept, dairying was a heavy

*United States* (New York: AMS Press, [1916] 1968), p. 16; Robert Leslie JONES, *History of Agriculture in Ohio to 1880* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1983), chap. 9; LAMPARD, *The Dairy Industry in Wisconsin*, passim.

18. For accounts of women's work in dairying in England from the Middle Ages to the end of the nineteenth century, see Eileen POWER, *Medieval Women*, ed. M.M. POSTAN (London: Cambridge University Press, 1975); Alice CLARK, *Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, [1919] 1982); Ivy PINCHBECK, *Women Workers and the Industrial Revolution, 1750-1850* (London: Virago Press, [1930] 1981); Jane KITTERINGHAM, "Country Work Girls in Nineteenth-Century England", in *Village Life and Labour*, ed. Raphael SAMUEL (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975): pp. 73-138.

19. PINCHBECK, *Women Workers*, pp. 10f. Pinchbeck notes, however, that as dairy farms became larger and the principal work of the farm, women's labour was more restricted to butter- and cheese-making (p. 42). Nevertheless, she explains women's disappearance from outdoor work on dairy farms as a result of competition for their labour in more attractive occupations (p. 110).

20. KITTERINGHAM, "Country Work Girls", pp. 95-96.

21. Ella Sykes pointed out the differences between English and Canadian domestic servants: "British servants are usually specialist, and do not grasp that in Canada they must turn their hands to anything, and be cook, house-parlourmaid, washerwoman, and perhaps baker and dairymaid all in one". Ella C. SYKES, *A Home-Help in Canada* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1912), pp. 24-25. In 1886 Henrietta McGill wrote of the high demand for the labour of "young girls that understand milking and doing general housework". *What Women Say of the Canadian Northwest* (London: H. Blacklock and Co., 1886), p. 34.

22. Canada, Department of Agriculture, *First Annual Report of the Dairy Commissioner of Canada for 1890* (Ottawa, 1891), p. 138.

23. Steward ST. JOHN, "Mrs. St. John's Diary, January 2, 1903 to March 30, 1904", *Saskatchewan History*, II (Autumn 1949): 25-30.

24. Cited by Virginia Watson ROUSLIN, "The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Pioneering in Canada", *Dalhousie Review*, 56 (Summer 1976): 328.

work-load for farm women, both because of the back-breaking conditions under which the labour was performed and because of the multiplicity of additional tasks which were the total responsibility of farm women.

Because dairying was rarely the primary focus of farm operations, there was a tendency to ignore it when capital improvements were considered. Frequently cows were stabled in miserable sheds so that milking meant exposure to the discomforts of the extremes of Canadian weather.<sup>25</sup> Also there was a tendency to use land for pasture that was considered unsuitable for ordinary tillage purposes. Usually such land was not well-suited for the best grasses for dairying either.<sup>26</sup> Rarely did the farm have a dairy room, the various stages of straining the milk and separating the cream occurring in places such as cellars, barns, and root houses<sup>27</sup> with neither proper temperature control nor proper ventilation. The lack of proper dairy space meant that butter- and cheese-making had to take place in the farm kitchen or on farmhouse porches, conditions which would seldom make the work easier.<sup>28</sup>

Dairy equipment tended to be primitive and improvements in technology were slow to be used widely on farms. Generally this was not because dairy women were skeptical about their use, but because they had little control over capital expenditures on farms. The first Dairy Commissioner of Canada, in an address at Berlin, Ontario, in 1889, spoke at length about the problem:

I know the farmers' wives are able to make the very finest butter when they get a fair chance, but the trouble has been that the men have all the good things. *They* [emphasis in original] had to have the horses, and the reaping, and mowing machines, and the driving sheds, and everything else *they* wanted, while their wives had to get along with one pantry for keeping the milk, the butter, the cold vegetables, the pies and everything else... [G]o round and see the women struggling with an old fashioned churn, working twice as long in churning the butter as there is any need for... [G]et rid of these old fashioned churns and milk houses and you will revolutionize the butter trade at once.<sup>29</sup>

In fact, he advocated what must have been extreme measures at the time to awaken farmers to the plight of their wives:

I am not in favour of strikes; but if I could reach the ears of the good women that are such an ornament and joy to the households of Canada, I would have them strike and say "We won't do anything until you give us new churns and milk house."<sup>30</sup>

Farmers in Quebec were no more inclined to invest in dairy equipment for the "ornaments and joys" of their households than were those in other parts of Canada. Elisa Jones, in her book on farm dairying, deplored in 1894 the reluctance of farmers to invest in cream separators.

25. Isabel SKELTON, *The Backwoodswoman: A Chronicle of Pioneer Home Life in Upper and Lower Canada* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1924), p. 221.

26. W.M. DRUMMOND, "Problems of the Canadian Dairy Industry", in *The Dairy Industry*, ed. INNIS, p. 139.

27. Laura ROSE, *Farm Dairying* (London: T. Werner Laurie, 1911), p. 143.

28. See RUDDICK, "Development of the Dairy Industry", p. 26, for a description of the difficulty in churning butter when temperature conditions are not exactly right.

29. *Report of the Dairy Commissioner for 1890*, p. 138.

30. *Ibid.* Unfortunately the dairy commissioner felt compelled to make his argument stronger by conjuring up the trivial and competitive nature of women: "I believe if one woman gets a nice, attractive, cheap dress, 20 more women want to get the same or something better; and if one woman gets a nice new milk house and churn, 20 more women give their husbands no peace, day or night, until they get that new milk house and churn also. This would bring very much good to the dairy business."

Milking the cows, Ontario, circa 1900



Source: Public Archives of Ontario, Acc. 9238, S15911



Je ne comprends pas qu'un homme ayant le moindre égard pour ses animaux domestiques puisse se passer d'un écrémeur; cet instrument dispense en effet d'une quantité de travail surprenant, et, pour parler d'une manière familière, "il est généralement moins coûteux d'avoir soin de sa femme que de l'enterrer".<sup>31</sup>

The assumption in both of these examples is that the male farmer controlled capital expenditure on the family farm, even though the dairy work was in the female domain.<sup>32</sup> The fact that women's work in dairying was less capital-intensive than other aspects of farm production undoubtedly placed female labour and its productive capabilities at a disadvantage, a factor which in turn perpetuated the tendency to concentrate capital in the areas where men worked. But lack of direct investment in women's dairying was not the only problem affecting women's productivity. All aspects of women's farm labour tended to receive less attention than men's when capital improvements were being made. In a study which examined the reasons for the exodus of women from rural areas in the early part of the twentieth century, the problem of the absence of capital improvements in the home was noted as being particularly significant. For example, practices such as locating wells with pumps close to barns rather than houses had the effect of making male labour more efficient at the expense of women's work.<sup>33</sup> To the extent that time on housework was not reduced, women's efforts in other areas of production were affected.

Although women were able to generate surpluses from dairy production, they were frequently unable to generate sufficient money to improve their technology because they traded in small sums or bartered.<sup>34</sup> Until the transformation to factory production, a substantial amount of market activity in dairying did not enter the money economy at all. The small-scale nature of individual production and the problems of adequate transportation to urban markets often forced women to barter their farm produce for groceries or to trade with neighbours who could provide some essential service.<sup>35</sup> This practice lasted well into the twentieth century. At least one analyst saw the prevalence of barter in dairying as the reason for the underdeveloped nature of the industry.<sup>36</sup> In fact, barter was more likely the result of underdeveloped markets rather than the cause of them. In any case, its practice made reinvestment in dairying difficult. Even when money was received for dairy products, women were unlikely to be able to invest it in improved technology. Income from dairying was considered most often to be directly applicable to household

31. Eliza M. JONES, *Laiterie payante ou la vache du pauvre* (Trois-Rivières, 1894), p. 40. Emphasis in the original.

32. The term "family farm" obscures the ownership issue of the farm and its technology. For an interesting discussion of this problem, see Max H. HEDLEY, "'Normal expectations': Rural Women without Property", *Resources for Feminist Research*, 11 (March 1982): 15-17.

33. John MACDOUGALL, *Rural Life in Canada: Its Trends and Tasks* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, [1917] 1973), p. 128.

34. RUDDICK, "Development of the Dairy Industry", p. 26; BINNIE-CLARK, *Wheat and Women*, p. 128; "Mrs. St. John's Diary", p. 26.

35. For example, LOUISE TIVY, *Your Loving Anna: Letters from the Ontario Frontier* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), pp. 72-73.

36. "The trading of dairy goods for dry goods and groceries is one of the greatest hindrances to the development of dairying in Canada, as it places little or no premium upon brains and skill, which are necessary factors in the making of a fine quality of dairy goods". Henry H. DEAN, *Canadian Dairying* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1903), pp. 64-65.

maintenance so that the income from the main business of the farm could be reinvested in the farm itself.<sup>37</sup>

Another factor limiting women's dairying was the diversity of labour that farm women performed. Women's main tasks were having and caring for children and performing the housework which was essential for the reproduction of farm labour. Usually, these household tasks involved a wide variety of activities to provide food and other items for the family's consumption. The type and extent of the activities varied considerably through time and from one part of the country to another. Some activities, such as cloth- and clothes-making, could be carried out in the months when dairy activities were slight.<sup>38</sup> But many farm activities which were extremely time-consuming had to take place when women were most busy with dairy work as well. For example, the raising of poultry was another important source of income and was carried out on most farms.<sup>39</sup> Many farm women also raised fruit and vegetables and made honey and maple sugar both for family use and to trade or sell. During planting and harvest time women were expected to work in the fields as well. In some locations the seasonal pressures on women were extraordinary. In Newfoundland, in the early twentieth century, for example, all but the poorest fishing families kept at least one cow for the family's needs. This was the total responsibility of women at a time when they spent most of their day in the process of drying fish.<sup>40</sup>

For farm women on wheat farms in the western provinces the usual farm duties were compounded by having to cook and clean for a large labour force at regular intervals. One farm woman described a typical day during a busy season:

In seeding-time she will be up at 4 A.M. to get the men their breakfast. Then she will have to milk, and separate the cream afterwards, if they have a separator. If there are several cows it is quite a back-aching task. Then there will be the house to clean, the breakfast things to wash up, the beds to make, and she must not waste time over that part of her day for there is dinner to cook for hungry men by 11:30. After washing up again the afternoon will mean breadmaking, or clothes washing and ironing, or jam-making, or butter-churning — one of the endless things like that anyway, and at 7:30 or 6:30 (according to the season of the year) she must have "tea" ready. Tea is nearly as big a meal as dinner and the last meal of the day. After that she must wash up, then milk two cows and separate her cream before she can think of going to bed. Probably there will be some darning or mending to do even then. That is a straightforward day, but it is greatly complicated when the children begin to come.<sup>41</sup>

Paid female farm labour appeared to have an equally strenuous work-load. An article in the *Grain Grower's Guide* in 1910 pointed to the differences in the

37. BINNIE-CLARK, *Wheat and Women*, p. 128; JENSEN, "Cloth, Butter and Boarders", p. 18. It is clear from the comments of women about their dairying that many regarded the income which they received from it as belonging to them, even though the proceeds were to be applied to the family's keep. See, for example, *What Women Say of the Canadian Northwest*, and "Mrs. St. John's Diary", p. 26.

38. For an illustration of the amount of work involved in cloth-making in a family whose primary income came from butter, see Susan Dunlap's diary written in Nova Scotia in the middle of the nineteenth century. G.G. CAMPBELL, "Susan Dunlap: Her Diary", *Dalhousie Review*, 46 (Summer 1966): p. 218.

39. JONES, *Agriculture in Ontario*, p. 286.

40. Hilda MURRAY, "The Traditional Role of Women in a Newfoundland Fishing Community" (M.A. thesis, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1972) describes women's work in fishing and family subsistence activities in Newfoundland.

41. Mrs. George CRAN, *A Woman in Canada* (London: John Milne, 1910), pp. 118-19.

amount of work done by men and women hired on farms. The men invariably had regular hours for work, while women were expected to work all the time: "for no farmer will pay a woman wages unless he has work enough to keep her all the long day, and paying work at that, such as butter-making for her to do."<sup>42</sup> This was verified by the testimony of a woman who was offered a job as a home-help on a farm. She was expected to cook for four men and an invalid woman, milk three cows, make butter, and do all the washing and cleaning for the household.<sup>43</sup>

In spite of the work-load for female farm servants the work of the farm wife was rarely diminished. Usually the additional female labour made the expansion of the dairy and other market activities of the farm woman possible. One woman who did not have a servant had to keep the size of her dairy herd down because she simply could not manage more. For her it would certainly have made sense to have a servant, if she had been able to find one, because "she would soon pay for herself out of the extra butter I would be able to make."<sup>44</sup> Another farm woman echoed this frustration over not having the time for lucrative economic activities: "I wish I could hire one [female servant] to help me with dairy and chickens, and the pigs, they are all my 'perquisites' and I could make a lot of money by them if I had more time."<sup>45</sup>

The constraints on women's dairy work were significant. The fragmented nature of farm women's work and the problems they faced in accumulating capital and hiring labour tended to keep the production of women's dairying at a relatively low level and served to restrict the size of the dairy herds which could be conveniently handled by a small labour force using rather primitive technology. As markets grew and farmers recognized the advantages of expanded dairying, the small-scale production which women could manage became less tenable.

#### IV — GROWTH IN MARKETS

The market in dairy products increased rapidly and exports grew considerably even before factory production began. In 1861 butter production was almost 26 million pounds in Upper Canada and almost 16 million pounds in Lower Canada (Table 1).

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42. "Good Cooking", *The Grain Growers' Guide*, 4 (8 April 1910), reprinted in *The Proper Sphere: Woman's Place in Canadian Society*, eds. Ramsay COOK and Wendy MITCHINSON (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1976), pp. 189-91.

43. SYKES, *A Home-Help*, p. 34.

44. CRAN, *A Woman in Canada*, p. 101.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 135. The problem of finding farm servants was serious, particularly in the western parts of the country. According to "The Manitoba Women's Burden", an article published in *The Virden Advance*, 4 July 1904, "One of the most urgent problems before the farming community in Manitoba is the securing of help in the house and in such branches of the industry as dairying and poultry raising, so essentially feminine... Many men have to abandon farming as a profession because their wives are unequal to the physical strain which the endless duties of a farm house imposes on them". Cited by Genevieve LESLIE, "Domestic Service in Canada, 1880-1920", in *Women at Work: Ontario, 1850-1930*, eds. Janice ACTON, Penny GOLDSMITH, and Bonnie SHEPARD (Toronto: Canadian Women's Educational Press, 1974), p. 109.

**Table 1**                    **Homemade Butter and Cheese Production by Province, Canada, 1851-1891 (in millions of pounds)**

		1851	1861	1871	1881	1891
Ontario	Butter	16.1	25.8	37.6	54.9	55.6
	Cheese	3.4	2.7	3.4	1.7	1.1
Quebec	Butter	9.6	15.9	24.3	30.6	30.1
	Cheese	.8	.7	.5	.6	4.3
Nova Scotia	Butter	3.6	4.5	7.1	7.5	9.0
	Cheese	.6	.9	.9	.5	.6
New Brunswick	Butter	3.1	4.6	5.1	6.5	7.8
	Cheese	—	.2	.2	.2	—
Prince Edward Island	Butter	—	.7	1.0	1.7	2.0
	Cheese	—	.1	.1	.2	.1
Manitoba	Butter	—	—	—	.9	4.8
	Cheese	—	—	—	—	.2
British Columbia	Butter	—	—	—	.3	.4
	Cheese	—	—	—	—	—
Alberta	Butter	—	—	—	.1	.4
	Cheese	—	—	—	—	—
Saskatchewan	Butter	—	—	—	—	1.5
	Cheese	—	—	—	—	—
Total Canada	Butter	32.4	51.5	75.1	102.5	111.6
	Cheese	4.8	4.6	5.1	3.2	6.3

Sources: Canada, *Census*, 1871, vol. 4, "Censuses of Canada 1665 to 1871", pp. 197, 219, 227, 237, 275, 325, 337, 355, 365, 397; *Census*, 1871, vol. 3, p. 220; *Census*, 1881, vol. 3, p. 248; *Census*, 1891, vol. 4, pp. 117-221.

Cheese-making was less important than butter-making at this time: in Upper Canada little more than 2 ½ million pounds of cheese were produced and in Lower Canada less than 700,000 pounds. Butter was considered more necessary than cheese to the diet of farm families and was therefore easier to market,<sup>46</sup> but this factor alone did not account for its wider production. It was also easier to learn how to make butter, and the process of butter-making was not as time-consuming or as difficult as cheese-making.<sup>47</sup> Before the rise of cheese factories, butter production was also

46. RUDDICK, "Development of the Dairy Industry", p. 25.

47. *Ibid.* Butter-making in itself was difficult and time consuming particularly if made by hand. See H.A. INNIS and A.R.M. LOWER, eds., *Select Documents in Canadian Economic History, 1783-1885* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1933), p. 558. Even when made by churn, butter-making was hard work. The barrel churn was often extremely primitive, merely being four planks of wood nailed together on a bottom. A great deal of labour was involved in keeping this type of churn clean. See SKELTON, *The Backwoodswoman*, p. 222. But even though the wooden cooper-made dash churn, which was in common use on farms until the 1880s, was a considerable improvement on the cruder homemade one, it was "an instrument of torture, still remembered by those who, as boys, had to operate them." RUDDICK, "Development of the Dairy Industry", p. 25. (This remark which stresses the suffering of males rather than females is interesting in particular because it comes from one of the few dairy historians who recognizes the feminine nature of farm dairying.) For an excellent description of the complexities of making farm butter, see ROSE, *Farm Dairying*, chap. 33.

more profitable, mainly because the by-product of butter-making, buttermilk, was in demand for pig-raising.<sup>48</sup>

From about mid-century the market for dairy products grew considerably. This was initially a result of the opening of American markets to Canadian producers. Rising American prices made Canadian products more attractive,<sup>49</sup> and in the short period between 1849 and 1851 it is estimated that butter production increased by more than 350 percent.<sup>50</sup> Improved transportation with the development of steamships and railways considerably expanded international dairy markets; and the Reciprocity Treaty, which permitted free trade in dairy products,<sup>51</sup> made the American market even more accessible.<sup>52</sup> The Civil War in the United States, which caused considerable disruption in dairy production in that country, further enhanced Canadian exports. The greatest impact of the war, however, was on cheese production, and ultimately this had important ramifications for women's control over dairying. From 1860 to 1862 Canadian exports of butter increased by over 60 percent. While this was dramatic, the increase in cheese exports was even more startling. From 1860 to 1863 these exports increased by over 700 percent.<sup>53</sup> The high prices paid in the United States for Canadian cheese lured many Canadian farmers into specializing in dairy farming.<sup>54</sup> The move was particularly sensible in the face of uncertain wheat production and the new technology which permitted cheese to be manufactured in greater quantities and more profitably in cheese factories.<sup>55</sup> Butter production at this time did not develop in the same way. Rather, it remained as a part-time activity for women on farms where most productive resources were concentrated on wheat growing or mixed farming. The amounts of butter produced in home dairies, however, was considerable and continued to rise until the second decade of the twentieth century.

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Early cheese-making was particularly time-consuming. Until cheese factories sold rennet, the farm women had to make this essential ingredient themselves. This was done by cleaning thoroughly and salting, drying and preserving the stomach of a suckling calf. With a solution of this, the curds and whey could be separated. See SKELTON, *The Backwoodswoman*, p. 223. The heaviest work involved the pressing and turning of the cheese: "The clumsy press and its huge stone weights, the bulky cheeses themselves which had to be lifted and rubbed so many times before being properly dried and seasoned, constituted very heavy labour which the worker had no appliances to lighten" (ibid). For a description of later methods of farm cheese-making, see RUDDICK, "Development of the Dairy Industry", p. 57, and ROSE, *Farm Dairying*, chap. 42.

48. JONES, *Agriculture in Ontario*, p. 252.

49. John McCALLUM, *Unequal Beginnings: Agriculture and Economic Development in Quebec and Ontario until 1870* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), p. 37.

50. JONES, *Agriculture in Ontario*, p. 253.

51. Early in the nineteenth century the prohibition of free trade and its effect on women received particularly scathing comments from Harriet Martineau. She tells of meeting a woman in Canada who gave an account of how it was necessary to smuggle butter and eggs into Buffalo from her neighbourhood. Harriet MARTINEAU, *Retrospect of Western Travel*, 2 vols. (London: Saunders and Otlet, 1838), 1: 142.

52. The Reciprocity Treaty of 1854-66 established free trade between Canada and the U.S. in all raw materials. Foodstuffs were included in this classification. On the effects of reciprocity, see Robert E. ANKLI, "The Reciprocity Treaty of 1854", *Canadian Journal of Economics*, IV, 1 (1971): 1-20; L. OFFICER and L. SMITH, "The Canadian-American Reciprocity Treaty of 1855-1866", *Journal of Economic History*, 28,4 (1968): 598-623.

53. Calculated from William J. PATTERSON, *Home and Foreign Trade of the Dominion of Canada: Also, Annual Report of the Commerce of Montreal 1871* (Montreal, 1872), p. 89.

54. JONES, *Agriculture in Ontario*, p. 253.

55. INNIS, *The Dairy Industry*, p. 5.

Paradoxically, while the opening of the American market was a great boon to the Canadian dairy industry, the closing of the same market with the end of the Reciprocity Treaty further stimulated cheese and butter production. The return of the tariff gave Canadian producers greater control over the domestic market for dairy produce at a time when farmers were being deprived of good markets for cereals in the United States. Dairy exports to Great Britain were stimulated, too. From 1865 to 1870 exports of butter increased from about 7 million pounds to almost 15 ½ million pounds and butter was still considerably more important than cheese in the value of exports.<sup>56</sup> But the introduction of cheese factories rapidly changed the nature of the dairy industry. By 1874 the amount and the value of cheese exports were considerably higher than those of butter.<sup>57</sup>

### V — RISE OF CHEESE FACTORIES

The rapid transition of cheese-making from the farm to the factory almost completely removed women from this form of dairy production in a very short period of time. By contrast, the factory production of butter was much slower to take hold, so women's displacement from this aspect of dairying was much more gradual.

Cheese-making was the first aspect of dairying to move to the factory, and for some time remained the only form of dairy production taking place off the farm.<sup>58</sup> The first cheese factory in Canada began operations in Ontario in 1864 with technology imported from the United States. Seven years later there were 353 cheese factories in the country.<sup>59</sup> By 1881 the production of homemade cheese in Ontario, the province which had the greatest number of cheese factories, was about half what it had been in 1871 (Table 1). And the *First Annual Report of the Dairy Commissioner of Canada* in 1890 stated that 99 percent of the country's cheese production occurred in factories.<sup>60</sup> By way of contrast, in the same year less than 3 percent of the butter of Canada was made in creameries.<sup>61</sup> With the rise of cheese factories, the character of dairying on the farm, and in particular the division of labour in dairy work, changed considerably. The specialization of farms in production of milk to supply cheese factories meant males increasingly became involved in

56. In 1870-71 butter exports were valued at over \$3 million while the value of cheese exports was \$670,000. William J. PATTERSON, *Report 1876*, p. 3.

57. PATTERSON, *Report 1883-85*, p. 113.

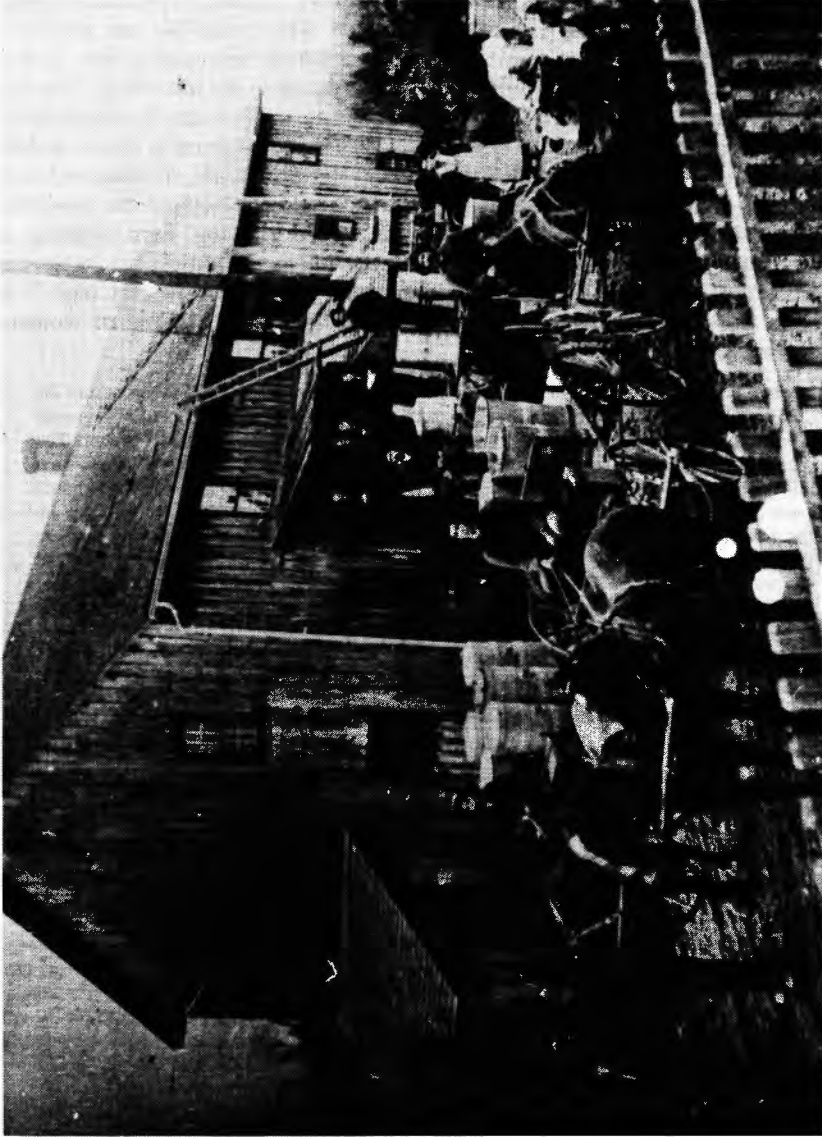
58. Early cheese factories were generally small local operations, employing one or two people, which did not operate either full-time or the whole year. The production methods and the technology used were not much different from those used in farm dairies. RUDDICK, "Development of the Dairy Industry", p. 57. Usually the cheese factories consisted of two buildings, one a "make" room and the other a curing room. According to the first head of the dairy school at Guelph, Ontario, in 1888 the cost of establishing a cheese factory with the capacity to handle milk from 200 cows was about \$1,000. Public Archives of Ontario, Acc. 10058, "History of Cheesemaking in Ontario", annual meeting of Western Ontario Cheesemakers Association, Ontario Agricultural College, Guelph, 12 March 1964, mimeo.

59. Of these factories 323 were in Ontario, 25 in Quebec, 3 in New Brunswick and 2 in Nova Scotia. PATTERSON, *Report 1876*, p. 38.

60. *Report of the Dairy Commissioner for 1890*, p. 6. By this time there were 1,565 cheese factories in Canada, with 892 in Ontario and 618 in Quebec. Canada, *Census*, 1891, bulletin no. 8, pp. 30, 36.

61. Butter factories were commonly called creameries.

**Cheese Factory at Warsaw, Ontario, 1880s**



*Source: Public Archives of Ontario, S1918*

the production process. As large dairy herds developed, dairying ceased to be a part-time occupation for farm women and more and more became the major work of the males on the farm.

Milking was the first type of female dairy labour to be more regularly performed by men. When the family farm had one or two cows milking was usually women's work. The cow which, as part of the wife's dowry,<sup>62</sup> had become part of the family's wealth, was her responsibility and its products belonged to her. As farms grew, there was a tendency for milking to be assigned to the hired help. The larger farms and larger farm households greatly added to the household responsibilities of farm women and their dairy work increasingly became confined to indoor activities. As long as any aspect of production involved the farmhouse, it remained within the female domain, but outdoor dairy activity gradually became the preserve of men. Certain activities, such as barn building, feed growing, barn cleaning, and the preparation of silage had been primarily male responsibilities, but increasingly the pasturing, feeding, calving and milking were also taken over by men.<sup>63</sup> In a textbook from 1911 widely used in dairying colleges, the passing of women as milkers was lamented.

Much might be said in favor of women as milkers. The withdrawal of women from the cow stable has been detrimental to the dairy industry. A woman has naturally greater patience and more innate kindness and a higher ideal of cleanliness than a man. The exercise of these virtues tells on the cows and on the milk-flow. Milking comes at such inconvenient hours for the housewife, and her duties are already so manifold, she should not be asked to go to the stable to milk. Moreover, many stables, I am sorry to say are not fit for her, with her skirts, to enter. It is well for the woman on the farm to learn how to milk, so that in case of sickness or absence of the men, they may attend to the cows.<sup>64</sup>

The introduction of cheese factories made it possible for greater amounts of cheese to be made by a small labour force, but for the farms which supplied the raw material, the labour involved in dairying increased. Milking remained a labour-intensive task on most farms because the use of milking machines was slow to be accepted. Until well into the twentieth century milking was usually done by hand, so it became essential, as herds grew, for the farm unit to invest more in its dairy labour force, a force that was mostly male.<sup>65</sup>

The move to factory cheese production did not immediately separate women from cheese-making. In the early stages of factory production women were a

62. Rosemary R. BALL, "The Perfect Farmer's Wife: Women in 19th Century Rural Ontario", *Canada: An Historical Magazine*, 3 (December 1975): 11. Nellie McClung wrote of a wealthy farmer who owned three farms and left one to each of his three sons. "To his daughter Martha, a woman of forty years of age, the eldest of the family, who had always stayed at home, and worked for the whole family — he left a cow and one hundred dollars. The wording of the will ran: 'To my dear daughter, Martha, I leave the sum of one hundred dollars, and one cow named Bella.'" Nellie McClung, *In Times Like These* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, [1915] 1972), p. 91.

63. An immigrant woman, writing in 1901 with advice for pre-immigration training for British women, counselled that while skills in butter-making were essential, learning to milk was not necessary. "She will find she has quite enough to do without this, if she attends properly to the house, poultry and probably the garden." Elizabeth LEWTHWAITE, "Women's Work in Western Canada", *Fortnightly Review*, October 1901, reprinted in *A Flannel Shirt and Liberty*, ed. JACKEL, p. 119.

64. ROSE, *Farm Dairying*, pp. 121-22.

65. Milking continued to be done by hand for a long time after factory production of cheese was commonplace. Although milking machines were available, most farmers found the milk yield was



considerable portion of the labour force although, admittedly, the labour force itself was not large. In 1871 37 percent of the labour in cheese factories was female (Table 2).

**Table 2** Employment in Cheese Factories by Gender, Ontario, Quebec, and Canada, 1871-1911

Year	Ontario		Quebec		Canada <sup>a</sup>		Females as % of total
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	
1871	577	332	37	40	624	374	37.0%
1881	1,348	287	262	62	1,652	351	18.4%
1891	1,755	175	876	95	2,726	287	9.5%
1901 <sup>b</sup>	2,733	—	3,630	—	6,886	—	—
1911 <sup>c</sup>	2,446	1	3,255	—	6,143	1	—

Sources: Canada, *Census*, 1871, vol. 3, p. 372; *Census*, 1881, vol. 3, p. 406; *Census*, 1891, vol. 3, pp. 93-98; *Census*, 1901, vol. 2, pp. 306-19, vol. 3, pp. 18-39; *Census*, 1911, vol. 3, pp. 52-83.

<sup>a</sup> Cheese production outside Quebec and Ontario was negligible for these years. Even by 1911 over 97 percent of factory production of cheese took place in these two provinces.

<sup>b</sup> The figures for 1901 and 1911 represent employment in both cheese and butter factories. There were 126 males and 25 females employed in creameries in Canada in 1881 and 401 males and 24 females in creameries in 1891.

<sup>c</sup> In 1911 there were also three individuals of unspecified sex under sixteen years of age who were working in cheese factories in Ontario.

Because production methods in early cheese factories were similar to those used in domestic production and because the factories themselves were often located on the farm, it was not unnatural for the makers of farm dairy cheese to participate in factory work. But even from the beginning it was recognized that factory production would eventually eliminate women from cheese-making. In the year in which the first dairy factory in Canada was established, the *Canadian Farmer* noted that the innovation in cheese-making would mean farm women would no longer have to do this heavy and difficult work. "The old method of cheese-making has done more to injure the health of women in cheese-dairying districts than any other cause."<sup>66</sup> As cheese production in factories became more regular, women's presence was eliminated. By the turn of the century there were no women working in cheese factories in Canada.

Women continued to make some cheese in farm dairies but the amount was insignificant compared to factory production.<sup>67</sup> Some small cheeses required too much time and trouble for cheese factories<sup>68</sup> and were still profitable for farm

likely to be greater with hand milking. By the time Laura Rose wrote her text book in 1911, the use of milking machines was clearly the way of the future. However, even then their use tended to be restricted to farms with herds of fifty or more. *Ibid.*, pp. 132-33.

66. JONES, *Agriculture in Ontario*, p. 251.

67. By 1911 homemade cheese accounted for less than one percent of total cheese production in Canada. Canada, Dominion Bureau of Statistics, *Dairy Factories 1920*, p. iv. Women's rapid exit from cheese-making in Canada was probably accentuated because of the adoption of the English, rather than the French, taste for cheese. Where local, regional differences in cheese are important to consumers (as in France), farm production and women's work as cheesemakers tends to remain longer than where the product has a more homogeneous nature. I am grateful to Griff Cunningham for pointing this out to me.

68. In the nineteenth century there was a trend toward producing particularly large cheeses. The biggest, "The Canadian Mite", was made for the Chicago World Fair in 1893. It weighed 22,000

women, but frequently this type of work was considered more trouble than it was worth.<sup>69</sup> On the whole, cheese-making by farm women ceased to be an important source of income for farm families. By 1910 the total value of homemade cheese was placed at \$154,000. In the same year the value of homemade butter was over \$30 million.<sup>70</sup>

## VI — CHANGES IN BUTTER-MAKING

Creameries for butter-making were much slower than cheese factories to become established, so women continued to be Canada's butter-makers until well into the twentieth century. The first Canadian creamery began in Quebec in 1873,<sup>71</sup> but by the turn of the century the greatest proportion of Canadian butter was still being made by farm women. The 1901 census shows that while 36 million pounds of butter were being made in factories, over 105 million pounds were being produced on farms (Table 3). By 1911 only in Quebec did the factory production of butter exceed home production. For the country as a whole less than a third of butter production took place in factories.<sup>72</sup>

Butter production remained in women's hands for a variety of reasons. First, domestic butter-making was a much simpler operation than domestic cheese-making. Making cheese on the farm required more space and equipment than making butter and required a skill which was less readily learned.<sup>73</sup> But also significant were the much higher costs involved in butter production in factories. The capital costs for creameries were more than two-and-a-half times greater than for cheese factories, and the costs involved in hauling materials were considerably higher as well.<sup>74</sup> Until separators were widely used on farms, whole milk was hauled to the creamery. Milk was also transported to cheese factories, but these establishments used the entire product, while butter factories used only cream in production. This involved

pounds, was 28 ft. in circumference, 6 ft. high, and was made from 207,000 lbs. of milk. Virginia McCORMICK, *A Hundred Years in the Dairy Industry* (Ottawa: Dairy Farmers of Canada, 1968), pp. 72-73.

69. One commentator felt women tended to overestimate the amount of labour involved in cheese-making. "There is no reason why farm dairy cheese should not be made in about four hours, or in such time that the farmer's wife or daughter may get through before noon, as most women object to work of this kind after dinner — and rightly so". DEAN, *Canadian Dairying*, p. 97.

70. Canada, *Census*, 1921, vol. V, p. vii.

71. *Dairy Factories 1920*. The first successful creamery in Ontario was begun by two storekeepers in Teeswater in 1876. But very little butter was made in factories before 1880. JONES, *Agriculture in Ontario*, p. 263. By 1890 there were 112 creameries in Quebec and 45 in Ontario. Canada, *Census*, 1891, bulletin no. 8, pp. 30, 36.

72. It is important to note that farm production was probably considerably higher than statistics indicated. The census of 1911 in particular noted that farmers rarely kept adequate records, "and as a consequence are apt either to ignore altogether or greatly underestimate the quantities of vegetables, fruit, milk, cream, butter, cheese, eggs and honey consumed on the farm during the seasons when these are produced in greatest abundance". Canada, *Census*, 1911, vol. IV, p. vi.

73. WIEST, *The Butter Industry*, p. 40.

74. Calculated from Canada, *Census*, 1891, bulletin no. 8, pp. 19-39; *Census*, 1901, vol. II, p. liii.

**Table 3** Butter Production in Creameries and on Farms by Province  
(in millions of pounds), Canada, 1901-1941

Province		1901	1911	1921	1931	1941
Ontario	Creamery	7.6	13.9	37.2	77.5	86.3
	Farm	55.4	63.2	33.5	24.3	24.5
Quebec	Creamery	24.6	41.8	41.6	69.7	76.5
	Farm	18.3	19.6	15.5	13.7	10.2
Nova Scotia	Creamery	.3	.4	2.5	5.9	6.5
	Farm	9.1	11.0	8.7	6.1	5.9
New Brunswick	Creamery	.3	.8	1.1	2.4	4.5
	Farm	7.8	9.1	8.4	8.1	5.2
Prince Edward Island	Creamery	.6	.7	1.2	2.0	2.7
	Farm	1.4	2.3	2.1	1.8	1.3
Manitoba	Creamery	1.6	2.1	7.6	21.1	31.1
	Farm	8.7	10.9	8.4	9.1	9.4
British Columbia	Creamery	.4	1.2	2.1	5.4	6.1
	Farm	1.1	1.2	1.9	1.6	2.5
Alberta	Creamery	(.7)*	2.1	11.8	23.0	35.3
	Farm	1.2	7.7	9.1	11.9	14.0
Saskatchewan	Creamery	(.7)*	1.5	6.6	19.0	37.1
	Farm	2.3	12.1	15.9	21.0	21.3
Total Canada	Creamery	36.1	64.5	111.7	226.0	286.1
	Farm	105.3	137.1	103.5	97.6	94.3
Farm butter as % of total production		75%	68%	48%	30%	25%

Sources: Canada, *Census*, 1901, vol. 2, pp. 210-17; *Census*, 1911, vol. 4, pp. 348-57; *Census*, 1921, vol. 5, p. 56; *Census*, 1931, vol. 8, pp. 12, 52, 82, 152, 205, 389, 545, 597, 669, 736; *The Canada Year Book*, 1924, pp. 242-43; *The Canada Year Book*, 1933, p. 252; *The Canada Year Book*, 1942, p. 214.

\* Alberta and Saskatchewan combined.

transporting six times the bulk necessary for production to creameries.<sup>75</sup> Also the methods of separating cream, even at the creamery, were slow and labour-intensive.<sup>76</sup> Production in cheese factories was both less wasteful and provided a more reliable product. The result was that cheese exports soared while those of butter declined. Cheese exports increased from 6 million pounds in 1868 to over 88 million pounds

75. JONES, *Agriculture in Ontario*, pp. 263-64.

76. Laura Rose describes the gravity method in use before the centrifugal separator was widely used. This involved letting milk set in shallow pans for twenty-four hours. The cream would rise to the top after which it could be skimmed off the top and into a pan. She says the disadvantages of this method were serious, including: "a great surface of the milk exposed to atmospheric contamination; the milk liable to become too rancid for domestic and feeding purposes; the cream clotted and over-ripe; the creaming incomplete; a large space necessary for the pans, and much labour involved". ROSE, *Farm Dairying*, p. 144. Another method was the deep can method where cans from eight to twenty inches deep were set in tanks of cold water for twelve to thirty-six hours. This procedure involved considerable amounts of ice and much heavy lifting. RUDDICK, "Development of the Dairy Industry", p. 27.

**Old-fashioned plunger-type churn made of crockery**



*Source:* Western Canada Pictorial Index, Brandon Museum Collection, 442-14244

**The more efficient “Daisy” churn, a barrel hand churn**



*Source:* Public Archives of Ontario, Acc. 10058-8

in 1889. During the same period butter exports dropped from 13 ½ million pounds to fewer than 2 million pounds.<sup>77</sup> This development of the cheese export market also served to retard the growth of creameries.

Even though there were several factors which perpetuated butter-making on the farm, this method of production was frequently criticized. The uneven quality of homemade dairy products was a common complaint. Usually the blame was placed on inadequate production methods and sometimes even outright fraud.<sup>78</sup> In butter-making careless and unclean production methods, the use of ordinary Canadian salt instead of specially prepared factory salt, and holding cream until sufficient quantities to churn were produced, all tended to result in a less than ideal product.<sup>79</sup> So did feeding cows indifferently or with substances which strongly affected the taste of milk. But more deliberate actions also resulted in inferior products. In 1872 a public analyst examined 49 samples of butter and found that 23 of them had been adulterated.<sup>80</sup>

The problems with the quality of Canadian butter and in particular its lack of uniformity prompted petitions to government "praying that the inspection of butter may be made compulsory".<sup>81</sup> While the domestic methods of production were most often considered the source of the problems the entire blame cannot be laid here. In fact, many women had acquired reputations as especially fine butter makers.<sup>82</sup> The fact that butter made in the western parts of Ontario was notoriously bad while that in the Eastern townships was very good suggests less that women in the western part of the province were more slovenly in their production methods, than that marketing problems played a major role in creating the bad reputation for Canadian butter in general. Most women had few outlets for their butter. They could either trade with their neighbours or with local merchants in nearby towns. Often the merchant could not sell the butter immediately and would store it for as much as six months in his cellar, usually without proper packing, ventilation, or ice, until a travelling butter dealer took it off his hands.<sup>83</sup> Individual women who had to sell their produce where and when they could had no control over the quality of the article once it left their hands.

Gradually the handling and transportation facilities for butter improved in some areas of the country. In 1877 a special train with refrigeration and ventilation ran from Stratford, Ontario, to Montreal every Saturday during the dairy season.<sup>84</sup> When it reached Montreal, the dairy products designed for export to England were

77. *Report of the Dairy Commissioner for 1890*, p. 12.

78. DEAN, *Canadian Dairying*, p. 64; JONES, *Agriculture in Ontario*, p. 261; Mrs. Edward COPLESTON, *Canada: Why we live in it and why we like it* (London: Parker, Son and Bourn, 1861), p. 73.

79. INNIS and LOWER, *Select Documents*, pp. 558-59.

80. *Ibid.*

81. *Journal of the House of Commons*, 1877, 11: 162. The problem of poor quality dairy products was not peculiar to Canada. Early in the twentieth century an English dairying analyst referred to "ill-made and evil-flavoured" cheese in Britain. John Prince SHELDON, *Dairying* (Toronto: Cassel and Co., 1912), p. v; also, see Sutherland THOMPSON, *British and Colonial Dairying* (London: Crosby Lockwood and Son, 1913), p. 150.

82. RUDDICK, "Development of the Dairy Industry", p. 33.

83. SKELTON, *The Backwoodswoman*, pp. 221-22; PATTERSON, *Report 1877*, p. 119.

84. *Ibid.*, p. 120.

immediately put on ships which were fitted with special compartments for butter and cheese, and to minimize the amount of time the produce would spend in unrefrigerated conditions, these items were the last freight loaded and the first unloaded. But mechanical refrigeration was not introduced on ships until 1897 so the quality of butter exports to England remained poor.<sup>85</sup> Moreover, the widespread use of refrigeration did not occur until considerably later.

By the end of the last decade of the nineteenth century several important changes occurred which were significant for transferring butter production from the farm to the factory. The change usually considered to be most important was the introduction of the centrifugal cream separator to Canada, the first one having been brought to the country in 1882 from Denmark.<sup>86</sup> This new technology revolutionized the old methods of recovering cream from milk and radically reduced the amount of labour for farm women in the process of butter-making. However, while the separator made butter-making on the farm easier and contributed to a more reliable product, its advent also made the use of factories more practicable. The separator worked as follows: the milk was placed in the separator bowl and was then subjected to a strong centrifugal force. The heavier substance, the skim milk, was thrown from the centre and was drawn off from the inside wall of the bowl. The lighter cream was forced inward and channelled off through an outlet near the centre of the bowl.<sup>87</sup> Separating cream from milk could then be done in a relatively short period of time and thereby very much reduce the risks of contamination and souring which were common problems with the earlier methods of separating the cream. The introduction of the separator also meant that whole milk did not need to be transported to creameries, making the cost of creamery-produced butter much lower than it had been. Not only was the cost of haulage considerably reduced, but also the skim milk could be left for use on farms. Altogether the new separator was heralded as an important advance. Not only would yields be higher and costs lower, but there was an added bonus: "The farmer's wife is saved the labor and worry of making butter on the farm."<sup>88</sup>

## VII — GOVERNMENT AID

The introduction of the separator was an important step toward creamery production of butter. However, it was not sufficient inducement to farmers to turn to creameries in large numbers.<sup>89</sup> Only with considerable government encouragement and money were farmers enticed into the industry and was butter-making thus removed from farm women.

85. RUDDICK, "Development of the Dairy Industry", p. 42.

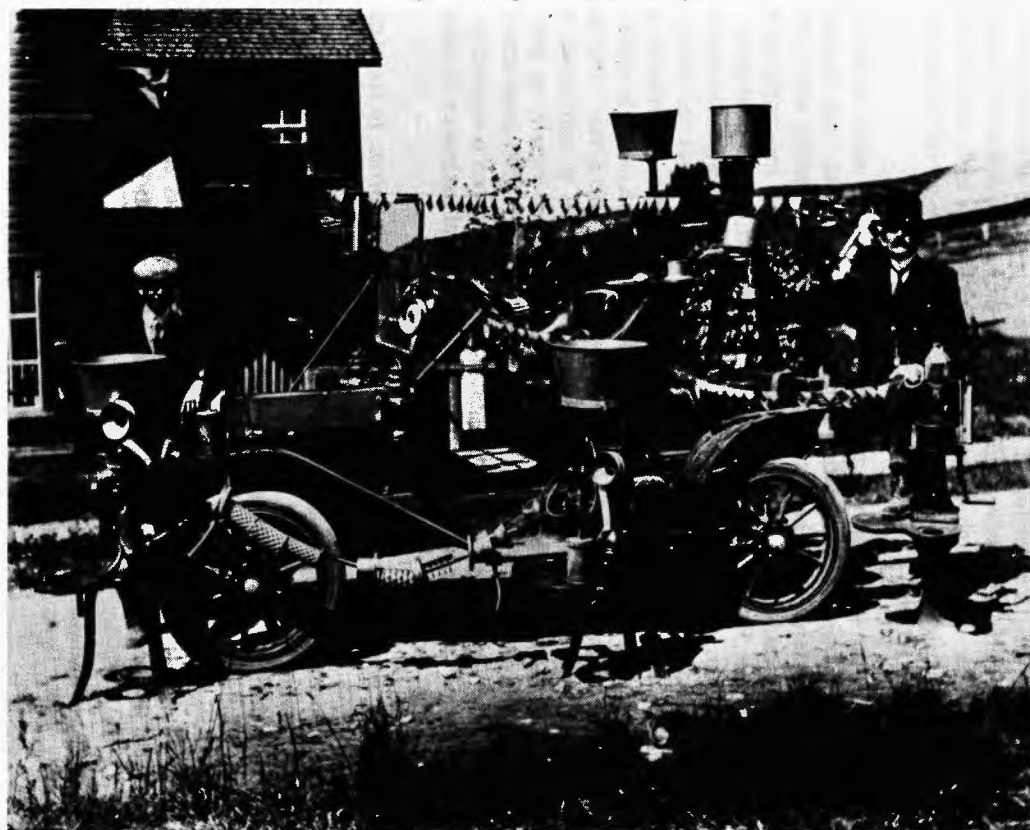
86. *Dairy Factories 1920*, p. 1.

87. ROSE, *Farm Dairying*, p. 148.

88. DEAN, *Canadian Dairying*, p. 65.

89. Separators were often a luxury which many farm households could not afford. A separator for a farm dairy with a herd of four to eight cows could cost between \$55 and \$75. ROSE, *Farm Dairying*, p. 174. Considering that the produce from a cow could be expected to bring in from \$30 to \$60 a year, the relative cost of a separator was high. *Ibid.*, p. 45. A price list of dairy supplies at the turn of the century shows Danish hand- and foot-powered separators selling for \$120 to \$135 while power separators cost from \$200-\$500. John S. PEARCE, *Price List of Dairy Supplies* (London, Ont., 1900), pp. 12-13.

Agents selling cream separators, Gore Bay, Ontario



Source: Public Archives of Ontario, Acc 2679, S8166

Substantial government aid was necessary to promote the rise of factory dairying in Canada.<sup>90</sup> As is not untypical of government subsidies in development projects in general, aid in Canada was biased toward increasing male activity in the dairy industry.<sup>91</sup> This is not to imply that government action, realistically, could have been different. The forces which restricted women's access to capital and tied their labour to work in the farm household were powerful deterrents to women's participation in capitalistic development. Rather, government promotion of dairying as a male activity was a reflection of the economic position of women and the notion that a more capital-intensive industry outside the home was rightly the sphere of males. Nevertheless, although government action cannot be seen to be the cause of women's decreasing participation in dairying, it certainly served to accelerate the trend in this direction.

Government aid to the dairy industry was motivated by a desire to stimulate and improve production as competition from American, Danish, and Australian butter increasingly threatened the Canadian market. These countries were able to produce better products at lower costs because of improved transportation and production methods.<sup>92</sup> If Canada was to continue exporting dairy products the government recognized that production methods would have to change. Governments in Canada had begun to subsidize male dairy enterprises early in the history of cheese factories. Beginning in 1873 with the Ontario government, provincial governments instituted the practice of giving grants to dairymen's associations to encourage factory production. According to one dairy historian money was given "ever since there has been any organization among dairymen competent to administer such funds".<sup>93</sup> With the money the organizations were expected initially to provide factory inspection and education on new dairy methods. After 1890 these activities were slowly taken over by government itself, but aid to dairymen continued in the form both of new factory equipment and of direct financial assistance to farmers who started dairy factories.

Gradually government help took on a variety of other forms. In some cases governments became involved in the actual production of cheese and butter, although not with the understanding that this would be a permanent public venture, but to prove that the enterprise could be profitable to dairymen. Often government management was instituted in a factory primarily because male farmers simply did not possess the skills or experience necessary for butter- or cheese-making. In these cases some investment in the factory would be made by the farmers, but government agents would operate and manage the factory until the farmers acquired sufficient knowledge of the manufacturing end of the business themselves.<sup>94</sup> Frequently model

90. Unless otherwise noted the information on government assistance to the dairy industry comes from RUDDICK, "Development of the Dairy Industry", and FOWKE, *Canadian Agricultural Policy*, pp. 215-18.

91. For an excellent study of how development planners deal with women today, see Barbara ROBERTS, *The Domestication of Women: Discrimination in Developing Societies* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1980).

92. JONES, *Agriculture in Ontario*, pp. 260-63; FOWKE, *Canadian Agricultural Policy*, pp. 213-14.

93. RUDDICK, "Development of the Dairy Industry", p. 98.

94. For example, on Prince Edward Island in 1893 eleven new cheese factories were started with government agents as managers. By 1895 twenty-eight cheese and two butter factories in the province were operated for farmers by the government. In some parts of the country, government



creameries and cheese factories were established to teach new dairying techniques. Also, a variety of improvements in transportation facilities and refrigerated storage areas were made by the government.

Educational promotion was an important part of government efforts to stimulate factory dairying among male farmers.<sup>95</sup> Dairying schools and travelling dairies were instituted in a number of provinces to teach new dairying techniques. The first travelling dairy was sent by the federal government to Manitoba in 1894 to give demonstrations on the use of the cream separator, the testing of milk samples and the proper way to churn cream and work butter. Similar travelling dairies were sent to Saskatchewan, Alberta and B.C. The success of travelling dairies prompted some provincial governments to institute their own. Of particular note is that which was begun in Nova Scotia because it is the only one which appears to have been carried out by a woman. Laura Rose's travelling dairy, which began in 1901, was so popular that it was continued for six successive seasons and a second travelling dairy had to be added.<sup>96</sup> Several dairy schools were open to women. In fact, at the Agricultural College at Guelph, Ontario, the dairy department was the only branch of the college which was open to women at the turn of the century. Of the eleven students in the Government Dairy School in Winnipeg, four were female. Unfortunately, in most schools, a certificate-granting programme was a longer course of study and few women embarked on it. The National Council of Women reported in 1900 that while the Kingston Dairy School provided courses which were open to women, none had yet entered the longer certificate-granting course. The reason given was that the hours were long, and there was a great deal of lifting and heavy work involved. However, it should be considered that the women simply could not meet the preliminary work requirement for the course: it was necessary to have worked at least three seasons in a cheese factory or creamery.<sup>97</sup> Since the Census for 1901 reports that there were no women working in cheese and butter factories at that time, they would have had difficulty complying with this regulation.

Government education efforts constantly stressed an important change in the nature of dairying. It had become "scientific" and was therefore more worthy of the serious farmer's attention than it had been before. Women's dairying was viewed

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management of operations lasted for a long time. In Saskatchewan individual cooperative creameries continued "under what was practically general management by the government until the end of 1917". *Ibid.*, pp. 113-14.

95. See Ester BOSERUP, *Woman's Role in Economic Development* (London, George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1970), for a discussion of the adverse effect of male-centred education programmes in agricultural societies. Because of the discriminatory education policies of most colonial administrators, a productivity gap between male and female farmers is created, a gap which subsequently seems to justify their prejudice against women in agriculture.

96. Laura Rose is one of the few well-known women's names in Canadian dairying. In addition to operating her travelling dairy, she also lectured at the Farm Dairy School of the Ontario Agricultural College in Guelph and for the Ontario Department of Agriculture. In B.C. and Ontario she was an active organizer of the Women's Institutes. For information on Laura Rose see Alexandra ZACHARIAS, "British Columbia Women's Institute in the Early Years: Time to Remember", in *In Her Own Right: Selected Essays on Women's History in B.C.*, eds. Barbara LATHAM and Cathy KESS (Victoria: Camosun College, 1980), p. 57; also see James MORGAN, ed., *The Canadian: Men and Women of the Time* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1912), for a short biography and reference to Rose's much admired address on "The Womanly Sphere of Women".

97. National Council of Women, *Women of Canada: Their Life and Work* (Ottawa: National Council of Women, [1900] 1975), p. 87.

as an instinctive type of process, although, as was noted by a well-known dairy expert who specifically discussed the value of women's intuition, this approach could often be effective.

In the domain of cheese-making these [i.e., those who acquire mastery by intuition] will generally be women, at all events in private dairies; they hit upon one scientific truth after another by a process of reasoning which neither they nor anyone else can explain, but which is often correct nevertheless, and they do the right thing at the right time without caring to inquire into the why and wherefore of it.<sup>98</sup>

Whatever success women achieved was seen as having less to do with learning the trade well or acquiring skill through practice than through some haphazard approach associated with women's nature. The big business of dairying was seen as requiring a different type of approach, one that was more systematic, more intensive, and more masculine:

To combine the home-grown foddors with the more concentrated bought feeds so as to obtain the best results; to delve into the mystery of how the cow can take this food and manufacture the same into creamy white life-giving milk; scientifically to separate the cream and make the fat into golden bricks of fragrant butter; to get this butter to the best market and obtain for it the highest price; surely to accomplish all this demands a man of no small calibre.<sup>99</sup>

It was this type of man that governments wanted to encourage to specialize in dairying.

There is no evidence to show that women butter- or cheese-makers received any form of government subsidy. The various government agencies involved in promoting dairying at times expressed sympathy with farm women for the difficult conditions under which they laboured, but the only solution deemed feasible (outside of encouraging male farmers to provide better equipment for their wives) was to remove women from dairying altogether.

In some areas of the country women did move in the direction of trying to establish cooperatives to sell their eggs, cream and butter.<sup>100</sup> In the west in particular the poorly developed markets and the monopoly power of the merchants clearly placed the isolated woman at a disadvantage when selling her produce. Elizabeth Mitchell described the situation on the prairies just before World War I.

The farmer's wife might drive in ten miles or more, in time she could ill afford, and go to the first store to offer her goods, butter, eggs, cream, vegetables, all very perishable in hot weather. A low price would be offered, which she would refuse, but by the time the second store was reached the second store-keeper would be warned by the first, by telephone, not to go above his price.<sup>101</sup>

Clearly some sort of cooperative marketing venture could have improved the farm woman's position. But the efforts of women to organize were slow to develop and did not serve as an alternative to the growing tendency for the industry to be controlled by males. Dairymen's associations had already been well established and

98. SHELDON, *Dairying*, pp. 330-31.

99. ROSE, *Farm Dairying*, pp. 15-16.

100. Elizabeth B. MITCHELL, *In Western Canada Before the War: Impressions of Early Twentieth Century Prairie Communities* (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, [1915] 1981), p. 160.

101. *Ibid.*, pp. 117-18.

the various governments had found them useful channels for subsidizing dairying efforts. Homemakers' clubs and Women's Institutes had become interested in providing information to farm women on dairying techniques,<sup>102</sup> but the focus of these organizations regarding dairying was less on organization and distribution, than on production techniques on the farms themselves.<sup>103</sup> By this time the future of dairying was clearly in the factory and done by men. To be sure dairy production in the western provinces was still almost exclusively taking place on the farm and was being done by farm women, but the impetus toward factory dairying for the country as a whole was firmly established.<sup>104</sup>

No evidence so far suggests that women on farms perceived the government aid to males as a threat to their interests. However, one of the difficulties in understanding the relations of production within the family context is in ascertaining the extent to which changes in activities are understood by family members as being significant shifts in areas of control. Because the farm family is an economic unit where men and women share in a standard of living which is a product of their mutual and interdependent labour, the effect of change on individuals within the unit is often obscured by the perception of the benefit to the family as a whole. The close personal relationships within families undoubtedly meant that whatever antagonisms and contradictions arose in the production process were less likely to be recognized as arising from different relations in production than from the ordinary business of getting along in a marriage. Understanding the effect of change on women was undoubtedly complicated by the slow and uneven process of transforming dairy production from farm to factory, a process which meant that women were not abruptly displaced from the control of dairy production. Undoubtedly some women welcomed the reduced work-load which resulted when dairying was no longer their responsibility, but to others it meant a certain loss of independence. In a recent study of farm women's labour, Linda Graff quotes a woman who felt the loss of income from her own work for the market: "That's one thing about years ago when we had cows and hens, the women got the egg check and you had your own money to handle where you don't have your own money nowadays which is different and I don't like it as well."<sup>105</sup> Of course even today some farm wives are involved in the work of dairying, but the distinction is that where women had the primary responsibility for dairying in the pre-factory period, their role now is mostly to "help".<sup>106</sup>

102. *Labour Gazette*, December 1904, p. 651; MITCHELL, In *Western Canada Before the War*, p. 161; ZACHARIAS, "British Columbia Women's Institutes", p. 60.

103. Many farm women were exasperated by the nature of the programmes of the Women's Institutes. Mary Nicolaeff complained about the narrowness of their programme: "Always suggestions about housework, knitting, and the main woman's destination: 'preparing of dainty side-dishes and salads', Kitchen, kitchen, and again kitchen"! The reply to her letter pointed out that the programme also included a study of parliamentary procedure, the history of great women, and social settlement work in great cities. Mary NICOLAEFF, *Grain Growers' Guide*, 6 September 1915, reprinted in *A Harvest Yet to Reap: A History of Prairie Women*, eds. Linda RASMUSSEN, Candace SAVAGE, Anne WHEELER (Toronto: The Women's Press, 1976), p. 132.

104. By 1911 there were no cheese factories and only 8 creameries in British Columbia. Of the more than 2,000 people employed in creameries in Canada, less than one-tenth were west of Ontario. And of more than 2,000 cheese factories in Canada, only 17 were in the western provinces. Canada, *Census*, 1911, vol. III.

105. Linda GRAFF, "The Changing Nature of Farm Women's Work Roles Under the Industrialization of Agricultural Production" (M.A. thesis, McMaster University, 1979), p. 184.

106. *Ibid.*, pp. 149-53.

## VIII — CONCLUSION

The economic conditions of Canadian development were a strong inhibiting factor in the growth of large-scale dairying on farms before the middle of the nineteenth century. However, as transportation improved, dairy products became a significant factor in the export market at the same time that domestic markets for dairy products were expanding. During this time women's dairying became an important source of income for farm families. While women remained in dairying in the expanding pre-industrial stage, they did not manage to develop large-scale capitalist enterprises as the activity moved from household craft production to more capital-intensive factory production. Instead, women's work in dairying tended to remain labour-intensive and confined to what could be performed within the household.

The cultural assumptions about the proper nature of the sexual division of labour, which assigned household productive and maintenance activities almost exclusively to women, were an important factor in preventing women from maintaining their role in dairy production as it moved from the home. So too was the patriarchal structure of productive relations within the household, which blocked investment and capital accumulation in women's dairy work. While the family farm was a joint operation between husband and wife with regard to the use of labour, in legal terms the farm was owned by the husband. Males not only owned the means of production, but also decided where capital expenditures would be made. The competing demands on women's time along with the tendency of farm market activities to be dominated by males reinforced the inclination of investment decisions to be made in favour of those areas where men worked.

As markets expanded and technological innovations made large-scale dairying more profitable, farm units began specializing in dairying and it gradually ceased to be primarily a part-time occupation for farm women. Of course, many farms continued to produce for local, isolated markets and the income they received from this work was important for individual families. The extent to which women continued to work and be responsible for dairying varied across the country and tended to be highest where dairying was not a speciality of the farm. Wherever dairying maintained a craft tradition, that is, where all the processes involving labour and materials were supplied by the farm itself and where the labourers disposed of their products as custom work, women remained central to its operation.

However, dairy women were increasingly at a disadvantage. Government aid to dairymen's associations and education programmes aimed at improving the dairy skills of men served to increase the productivity gap between male and female dairy workers. In cheese-making women were rapidly displaced but in butter-making the transition to capitalist production was much less even, and women's farm-produced butter, in some sections of the country, was a significant part of total production until well into the twentieth century. As late as 1931 almost one-third of the butter produced in Canada was made by women on farms. But ultimately the inability of women to develop their household craft into capitalist production resulted in male domination of the industry.