

FARMING

Along with the field crops of wheat, oats, rye, clover, alfalfa, corn, peas, tobacco, and later soybeans, our mother raised chickens, ducks, /geese. Aunt Martha Yelk would come to help her kill and dress the chickens, ducks and geese in the early fall, after the minimum number had been retained for breeding a new crop, and sufficient chickens for our food, the year round. We ate a lot of chicken. Particularly, if there happened to be no meat in the house, and no time to go to town to buy it, our mother quickly killed a chicken by catching it first, then wringing its neck, and then chopping the neck off with a butcher knife. (She taught me how to do it as a child, but I succeeded only once, not quite killing it before it hopped around with his head cut off until it bled to death. I just couldn't do it. After killing it, it was dipped in a kettle of boiling water to soften the feather follicles, and then stripped of the feathers. Then, disembowled, cut into pieces, and immersed in a pan of cold well water for awhile, dependent upon how quickly it was needed, and then fried in a skillet atop the stove. For a special occasion, the chicken, or chickens may have been stuffed and baked in the oven.

With a large brood of chickens, the eggs were collected, candled for freshness, packed in egg crates, and taken to the grocery store for bartering for needed groceries.

We often had cartons of baby chicks, ducks, and geese in the kitchen behind the stove, at least overnight, when weather was too cold for them to survive in the "chicken house". Our mother always kept one ear alert for wild animals, raccoons, foxes in the early years, and our own cats and dog breaking into the chicken house. One knew they were being threatened with invaders if their loud cackling was heard during the night and awakened us. Then, our mother would brave the night, and go out to see what had caused the commotion. Another sound that could be heard in the night was Barney, one of our spirited horses, kicking his stall until one feared he would break loose. As we always had a large herd of cattle, our mother was likewise observant of the cows about to give birth to calves, and she could tell by their baying when they were in trouble. Day or night, she went to help them deliver. And, almost always, she could save the calf and the mother, very infrequently calling a veterinarian to come to help.

the hot summer, sitting on a milk stool between two cows exuding their heat in She helped the men milk the cows night and morning, /putting on overalls for this job, as well as for work in the fields. It seems that I saw our mother in overalls more than in

fields except driving the teams, and heavy harvesting and plowing. She often cleaned the barns when the men were in the fields early to get the crops planted, cultivated, and harvested. For all of the years I remember, the milk/cream separator that stood in the barn, and was operated by a hand crank, had to be thoroughly cleaned daily. She did this, and Soapy taught me to do it when I was old enough. Water had to be carried from the house, the entire mechanism taken apart, and the residual scum and flies collected removed, and then washed and rinsed, and reassembled. I disliked this job, particularly as I was fearful of the bull in the pen at the end of the barn, and Barney, the frisky horse, nearby in his stall.

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Sanitary conditions for care of the milk and cream were not what they are today, but the best under the circumstances. Enough raw milk was kept for our consumption, and the rest fed to the pigs. The cream was taken to the "Milkhouse", next to the well where fresh water could be run through the big tank in it where the "gooseneck" cans of cream were stored until it was delivered to the creamery, or picked up by a creamery truck. The milk and cream used by our family for drinking and cooking was unpasteurized for all of the years I was at home, until 1934. The cream caused a sort of scum on the top of the milk which was usually removed, but still a rich drink, and never as cold as that I learned to dislike milk as a child, and still do. we now drink that is refrigerated. /With the pasteruization process developed in 1920, and the homogenization process which broke up the fat globules and spread them throughout the milk following pasteurization, the milk industry gained momentum and became nationalized by 1930 as it could then be safely transported in bulk to markets across the country.

One of the dangers inherent in drinking raw, unpasteurized milk was the transmission of bovine tuberculosis, many people having contracted it through milk. (Our grandfather, had one of the first herds of cattle in Dane County registered and tubercular inoculated, and our father after him, so no doubt our parents were not concerned about the likelihood of our contracting tuberculosis from drinking the raw milk.)

((home made While I didn't care to drink the raw milk, I did like the rich, good/ice cream made from our milk and cream. With ice obtained from the Pierceville creamery))

In early years, most every farmer had a shotgun for use in obtaining food, such as wild ducks, geese, birds and animals, and for protection from animals such as raccoons and possums and foxes that raided the chicken coups or threatened the domesticated animals.

I've read somewhere that there were no cattle in the United States until 1624 when 2 cows and a bull were brought from England. Then, milk, cream, and butter became available to a few neighbors. A few years later, goats and pigs were added to the domesticated animals for food. By and after 1627, the colonists were able to divide the few cattle, and from then on, the milk and cattle industry began to grow, and eventually the industry became a reality.

(Most of our cattle were de-horned, and bred with a vicious looking bull quartered in a pen at one end of the barn in winter, and left out to graze with the cows in the summer where breeding took place.)