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Author(s): Joanna Bourke

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Dairywomen and Affectionate Wives: Women in the Irish Dairy Industry, 1890–1914¹

By JOANNA BOURKE

Abstract

Milking and butter-making were important to the rural Irish economy. In the nineteenth century, dairy work was dominated by women. By World War One, it was dominated by men. The establishment of creameries and male-only agricultural colleges, in addition to legislation limiting female hours of employment, encouraged the substitution of male labour for female labour. Schemes to educate rural women in the new dairying technologies had minimal effect. Although the value of dairy production in Ireland increased, female status in the industry declined as managerial control came to be vested in men. The removal of women from the dairy was justified by reference to the need of increasing female investment of time in housework.

ON 16 October 1892, the Irish-American, Denis Hurley, wrote to his sister in County Cork about their brother.

I believe Tim is foolish to be postponing his marriage so long under the circumstances. As dairy farming is the most profitable, he should get a good looking and affectionate wife that would make first class butter. If you cannot help him to get one in Cork, why I will give him a letter of recommendation to go wife seeking down to Connaught.²

Denis had emigrated to America twenty-two years earlier: his advice was becoming dated. Butter prices had been declining since Hurley left Ireland in the 1870s. They rose briefly in 1891 and 1892, before falling again. Prices did not pick up until the turn of the century and then remained relatively stagnant for another decade. However, the industry was vital to the Irish economy. In 1912 the production of butter and milk made up twenty-one per cent of the total agricultural income of Ireland.³ Astute

publicists could see that, with regard to female participation in dairying, the industry was changing. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the practice of Irish farm women milking cows, making butter for family consumption, selling the surplus in markets and shops, and using the money to pay off shop debts was no longer the dominant pattern. A technological and managerial revolution in the dairying industry was affecting female farm labour in large parts of the country. This article examines these changes. The first section discusses the declining participation of Irish women in milking and butter-making. What caused the movement of women out of these sectors? Historians of the dairying industry stress the rapid growth in the dairy industry in this period.⁵ The cost of these changes was high. Women were driven out of the industry. Contemporaries responded to increasing unemployment among dairywomen in two ways. Rural reformers attempted to educate women in improved

¹ I would like to thank the two anonymous referees for their help in preparing this article.

² Cork Archives, U170 Hurley Emigrant letters, letter from Denis Hurley to his sister Kate, dated 16 October 1892. His family was from Clonakilty (County Cork). Denis emigrated in 1870.

³ Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland (hereafter DATI), 'Council of Agriculture, 27th Meeting, Tuesday, 4 May 1915, Report of Proceedings', p 6.

⁴ R D Crotty, *Irish Agricultural Production, Its Volume and Structure*, Cork, 1966; Liam Kennedy, 'Aspects of the Spread of the Creamery System in Ireland', in Carla Keating, ed. *Plunkett and Co-operatives. Past, Present and Future*, Cork 1983, pp 92–110; and Cormac Ó Gráda, 'The Beginnings of the Irish Creamery System, 1880–1914', *Econ Hist Rev*, 2nd ser, xxx, 1977, pp 284–305.

forms of buttermaking. These schemes failed. More realistically, they attempted to divert 'redundant' labour into three areas: home industries, poultry-rearing, and housewifery. Economic and social forces meant that the promotion of housewifery was the dominant (and successful) response.

I

Census statistics provide information on the sexual division of labour within the dairying industry. People involved in milking and butter-making could be categorized under a number of occupations. A small proportion of domestic servants would have been employed as dairymaids, but this occupational group dropped from 220,700 women in 1891 to 144,900 women in 1911 and remained composed almost entirely of women. The number of female farm servants fell from 13,000 in 1891 to 9000 in 1901 then only 2000 in 1911. We have no way of knowing what proportion of these domestic and farm servants were dairymaids. Women explicitly given dairying occupations were placed in different categories 1851-1861, 1871-1891 and 1901-1911. In the nineteenth-century censuses, they could be called butterdealers and factors, milksellers and dairywomen, or cheesemongers and butterwomen. In 1881 women made up 43 per cent of all persons within these categories. Ten years later, this had declined to 31 per cent. If we then turn to the 1901 and 1911 census, under the heading 'milk seller, dairy woman', the percentage of women declined from 26 in 1901 to 16 per cent by 1911. The 1901 and 1911 census included a separate category for creamery workers. Women constituted almost 30 per cent of this category in 1901 and only 12 per cent by 1911. If we take all those occupations explicitly labelled as employment in creameries or concerned with milk and dairy products, in 1881 over 40 per cent of this workforce was female compared with less than one-sixth by the end of the period (see Table 1).

Men had begun to take a larger role in dairying. Wealthier households altered their practices first. Women in these families began relegating dairying tasks to hired male labourers.⁵ The first widespread change occurred in milking practice as this was an outdoor job and more easily re-defined as men's work. The *Agricultural Class Book*, in its editions of 1848, 1853 and 1860, encouraged young boys to read the chapter entitled 'The Cow - The Dairy - Milk - Butter - Cheese - Pigs' with the words 'possibly some boys, on reading the heading of this lesson, may be so foolish to think it is a fit study for girls only', but although girls milked, made butter, and scoured milk vessels, the boys should still read the chapter so that they could perform their role of feeding and attending to the cow, helping with particularly heavy churning, and supervising the women if necessary.⁶ Women regarded the dairy as their 'traditional' province.⁷ Folklore conferred 'natural' superior milking skills on women.⁸ But commentators agreed that increasingly men milked.

Long ago it was the women milked the cows, but in later years it was done in a lot of cases by the men.⁹

In days gone by cows were all milked by women. There was no such thing as a man milking a cow. Men would not consider it their work to milk a cow. Whatever be the cause, women have gone out of the

⁵ J P Sheldon, *Dairy Farming, Being the Theory, Practice and Methods of Dairying*, originally published in 1879, 1888, p 360.

⁶ Commissioners of National Education for Ireland, *Agricultural Class Book*, Dublin, 1848, edition 1848 (pp 240-1), and editions 1853 and 1860 (pp 288-9).

⁷ Helen Blackburn, ed, *A Handy Book of Reference for Irishwomen*, 1888, pp 84-5.

⁸ Irish Folklore Commission (hereafter IFC), Mss 843, story told by Mickey Crowley of Carrigroe (County Cork), aged 95 years, recorded between August and October 1942, p 88. Also see evidence by R A Anderson (secretary of the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society, hereafter IAOS) and Henry S Guinness (of Stillorgan in County Dublin, the owner of a dairy herd) in Department of Industry and Commerce for Saorstát Éireann (hereafter DIC), *Commissioners of Inquiry into the Resources and Industries of Ireland. Minutes of Evidence. Part 1. City Hall Dublin, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th December, 1919, Milk Production and Milk Products and Fisheries*, Dublin, 1919, pp 25 and 50-3.

⁹ IFC, Mss 1024, discussion by John Cullen, aged 71, labourer of Bailieborough (County Cavan), collected by P J Gaynor of Bailieborough, in January 1948.

TABLE I
 Percentage of Workers in Dairying Occupations Who Were Female
 1851-1911

Job	1851	1861	1871	1881	1891	1901	1911
Milkseller, Dairykeeper, Cheesemonger, Butterseller, Butterdealer and Factor	35.3	52.2	52.5	43.4	30.6	na	na
Creamery Worker, Milkseller, Dairykeeper	na	na	na	na	na	27.7	14.8
Farm Labourer and Servant	19.7	12.1	na	na	na	na	na
Agricultural Labourer	na	na	9.0	7.6	7.2	5.3	1.7
Indoor Farm Servant	na	na	14.4	17.1	10.8	10.6	3.5

business, and in a great number of cases, therefore, cows have got to be milked by men and boys.¹⁰

Although it is easy to perceive the general movement of men into milking activities, precise identification of the timing and locational aspects are more elusive. The evidence is impressionistic and often contradictory. For example, in 1911, dairy farmers in Bangor and Newtownards stated that male milkers had completely replaced females. They later added that the wives of milkers assisted their husbands in large dairies.¹¹ However, the questionnaires of the Folklore Commission and of the Cultra Folk and Transport Museum Archives provide some indication of the changes, although the precise dating of the data is difficult as the elderly respondents were encouraged to speak generally about 'their youth'.¹² In 1958 the Folklore Commission issued a questionnaire on the social aspects of work. Question five asked whether

milking was considered 'beneath the dignity' of the 'average farmer' in their district. Eighty-seven respondents replied by specifying whether men or women milked. The questionnaire on hiring fairs sent out by researchers at the Folk and Transport Museum asked for lists of work performed by male and female agricultural labourers. Eighty-two replies stipulated whether men or women milked. Examination of the questionnaires reveals a mixed pattern. Men rarely replaced women entirely in the business of milking. Poorer classes of women were more likely to be engaged in milking. Women did not milk where male wages were high. If the milk was used merely for household consumption, women were more likely to milk cows as part of housework. With the advent of creameries which regularized production and marketing, men were increasingly likely to take over milking. Furthermore, with increasing wages for male labourers and the rapid substitution of casual labourers for live-in servants, farmers were more likely to hire men who could be employed at other agricultural work during slack milking months. Thus, we see an increase of *male* farm servants in households with dairies. In a sample of the original census forms for eight District Electoral Divisions (that is, a sample of 4536 individuals in 1901 and 4215

¹⁰ DIC, *Resources and Industries of Ireland. 2nd, 3rd, and 4th December, 1919, Milk Production and Milk Products and Fisheries*, p 9, evidence by R A Anderson.

¹¹ 'Vice-Regal Commission on Irish Milk Supplies. Appendix to the First Report of the Irish Milk Commission, 1911. Minutes of Evidence (Taken in Dublin, Belfast and Newry, 29th November, 1911, to 1st March, 1912 (Inclusive) with Evidence', PP, 1913, XXIX, pp 281 and 285, evidence by M Shiels, farmer in Bangor and Rev. W Wright, Presbyterian clergyman at Newtownards and vice-chairman of the North Down Agricultural Society.

¹² These questionnaires may be found in the folklore archive at University College Dublin and in the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum at Cultra.

in 1911),¹³ ten per cent of all households in both 1901 and 1911 had dairy sheds. In 1901, while only 8 or 9 per cent of *all* households in the areas had either a domestic servant or a farm servant, 35 per cent of households with dairies had servants. By 1911 40 per cent of households with dairies had servants. The number of domestic servants and farm servants in these households remained stable. What changed was the sex composition of farm servants. In 1901 27 per cent of farm servants working on holdings with dairies were female. Within ten years, only 11 per cent were female.

II

Milking was only the first of many jobs in which a predominantly female workforce was replaced by men. The traditional way of making butter, with women churning the milk or cream, was gradually replaced (in the dairying regions) by large-scale creameries, co-operatively or privately run.¹⁴ The move to creameries was particularly strong in Limerick, Tipperary, Kilkenny, Sligo, Cavan, Monaghan, Cork, Leitrim, Kerry and Waterford.¹⁵ Canon Baggot started the first Irish creamery in 1884, to be copied five years later by the establishment of a creamery at Limerick Junction by two partners. Farmers in North

Cork and County Limerick experimented with joint-stock creameries. The English Co-operative Union also set up creameries in Ireland under the Industrial and Provident Societies' Act. However, the sudden upswing in large-scale butter production came with the growth of the co-operative movement under the managerial encouragement of the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society (IAOS). These creameries were managed by a committee elected by the shareholders. Farmers took shares in the co-operatives and profits were shared between the shareholders. People supplying milk were paid according to the highest market price for butter consistent with creamery survival. In most co-operative creameries, the farmer was paid in proportion to the amount of butterfat in the milk. The milk was separated by centrifugal separators and the skim milk given back to the supplier. By 1908, nearly all societies were adopting a 'binding rule' whereby the supplier had to supply all the milk to the society in which she or he held shares. There was also a tendency to restrict acceptance of milk from non-shareholders.

By 1915, the dairy societies of the IAOS had a membership of over 45,000 with a turnover of £3 million.¹⁶ Propounders of the creameries argued that they were the only salvation for a dairy industry depressed through generations of poverty, with insecure land-tenure, and facing strong international competition.¹⁷ Irish dairying required creameries because small-scale production techniques did not result in uniformly high quality butter. Without

¹³ The districts examined in 1901 and 1911 were Ards (County Donegal), Ballatrain (County Monaghan), Belleek (County Fermanagh), Keeldra (County Leitrim), Kilconickny (County Galway), Rathmore (County Limerick), Tullamore (Kings' County), and Woodstown (County Waterford). For a detailed analysis of these districts and labour trends in all sectors of the rural economy, see Joanna Bourke, 'Husbandry to Housewifery. Rural Women and Development in Ireland, 1890-1914', unpublished PhD thesis, Australian National University, 1989.

¹⁴ Co-operative creameries accounted for at most half of total butter production: Cyril Ehrlich, 'Sir Horace Plunkett and Agricultural Reform', in J M Goldstrom and L A Clarkson, eds, *Irish Population Economics and Society*, New York, 1981, pp 281-2. In Canada during the same period, the establishment of creameries drove women out of the industry: Marjorie Griffin Cohen, 'The Decline of Women in Canadian Dairying', *Histoire Sociale. Social History*, xvix, November 1984, pp 307-34 and J A Ruddick, 'The Development of the Dairy Industry in Canada', in Harold H Innes, ed, *The Dairy Industry in Canada*, Toronto, 1937, p 44. For a summary of the role of the Canadian government in this process which parallels the Irish case, see Fowke Vernon, *Canadian Agricultural Policy: The Historical Pattern*, Toronto, 1946, p 213.

¹⁵ DIC, *Agricultural Statistics, 1847-1926. Report and Tables*, Dublin, 1928, pp xx-xxi.

¹⁶ *Ministry for Reconstruction. Summaries of Evidence Taken Before the Agricultural Policy Sub-Committee Appointed in August 1916 to Consider and Report Upon the Methods of Effecting an Increase in the Home-Grown Food Supplies, Having Regard to the Need of Such Increase in the Interest of National Security*, PP, 1918, V, p 330, evidence by R A Anderson.

¹⁷ *Report from the Select Committee on Industries (Ireland), Together with the Proceedings of the Committee, Minutes of Evidence, and Appendix*, PP, 1884-5, IX, p 229, evidence by William John Lane, Cork butter merchant. Also see the letter from Mrs Anne Hart republished from *Daily Graphic in Irish Farming World*, 4 December 1891, p 788 and Liam Kennedy, 'Aspects of the Spread of the Creamery System in Ireland', in Carla Keating, ed, *Plunkett and Co-Operatives. Past, Present and Future*, Cork, 1983, pp 92-110.

creameries, the best butter was exported and sold at the same price as the 'rancid productions evolving from a smoky cabin, where one churning lay gathering for weeks.'¹⁸ The industry could not compete with mild Danish butter: Irish butter was accused of tasting of peat.¹⁹ What was the good of dairy farmers in Limerick or Cork having 'grass so rich you could grease your boots on it' if no market would accept their butter?²⁰ Even if women had the training and facilities for making high quality butter, the lack of uniformity in farmhouse butter meant they would not secure the highest price. Creameries increased the profits of dairy farmers. It was claimed that they raised the average price of the farmers' butter by about 4d per pound and increased output by as much as ten per cent.²¹ Creameries were said to be superior to the factory (or blending) system because 'responsible' butter-producers received the milk straight, so to speak, from the cow's teat, with no intermediate peasant woman to dirty the milk through her methods of setting, preparing and churning.²²

You would have to reform the conditions of Irish dairy farming altogether if you wanted to adopt the

factory [that is, blending] system, and you would have to teach every woman who makes a pound of butter in Ireland how to make it properly, you would have to build new dairies on special and proper principles, and you would have to have a system of inspection which would insure the dairies being properly clean. You must recollect that the bulk of butter which comes from Ireland is manufactured in districts where the people are untidy. I have known cases where some of the butter made in County Kerry was stored in a room where there was a patient suffering from typhus fever.²³

Historians have generally accepted this view of creameries, portraying them as economically desirable (because they are 'efficient') in areas with a sufficiently large milk supply.²⁴ However, creameries drastically reduced the income potential of many women and girls.²⁵

The inevitable effect of the general adoption of such institutions [creameries] in this country must be, I apprehend, to remove from the wives and daughters of the farmers a healthy, and at the same time, most valuable source of industrial occupation and training; in every way peculiarly adapted to their condition and habit of life for which it will not be easy to discover in any other direction, an equally suitable or sufficient substitute, and the want of which now, on the part of these by no means insignificant classes of the working population, may – it is quite conceivable – in the many possible contingencies of the future, be found to ultimately result in serious loss to the farmers themselves.²⁶

Local controversies developed as to the relative advantages and disadvantages of replacing homemade butter production by

¹⁸ Sarsfield Kerrigan, *Leader*, 7 March 1908, p 39. Also see 'Confidential Report [Base-line Reports], Congested Districts Board for Ireland, County of Donegal – Union of Inishowen, Report of Major Gaskell, Inspector, District of North Inishowen', p 3 and *Royal Commission on Congestion in Ireland. Appendix to the Eighth Report, Minutes of Evidence (Taken in Kerry and Cork, 3rd to 19th July, 1907)*, and *Documents Relating Thereto*, PP, 1908, XLI, p 75, evidence by the Very Rev. Canon Humphrey O'Riordan, representing the Bishops, the Cahirciveen Rural District and the fish curers.

¹⁹ *Committee on Butter Regulations. Minutes of Evidence to the Interim Report of the Departmental Committee Appointed by the Board of Agriculture and the Department of Agriculture and Other Industries and Technical Instruction for Ireland to Inquire and Report Upon the Desirability of Regulations . . . for Butter, With a Digest of Evidence; and Appendices*, PP, 1902, XX, p 300, evidence by Miss K A Brown, dairy instructress for the DATI in Donegal.

²⁰ Augusta Gregory, 'Ireland, Real or Imaginary', *Nineteenth Century*, November 1898, p 771.

²¹ Creameries extracted ten per cent more butter out of the same amount of milk used in home churning: *Leader*, 21 March 1908, pp 73–4.

²² The factory or blending system meant that farmwomen churned the milk in their home, then brought the butter to the factory where it was mixed with butter made by other women in the district, and marketed. Creameries separated the milk and churned the butter.

²³ *Royal Commission on Agriculture. Minutes of Evidence Taken Before Her Majesty's Commissioners Appointed to Enquire into the Subject of Agricultural Depression, with Appendices, Vol. III*, PP, 1894, XVI, Part III, p 393, evidence by R A Anderson.

²⁴ Ó Gráda, 'Irish Creamery System', *Econ Hist Rev*, 2nd ser, xxx, pp 284–305.

²⁵ For a comparative study based on the introduction of creameries in Denmark from the 1880s, see Bodil K Hansen, 'Rural Women in Late Nineteenth Century Denmark', *Jnl of Peas Stud*, 9, 1982, pp 225–40.

²⁶ *Royal Commission on Labour. The Agricultural Labourer. Vol. iv. Ireland. Part iii. Reports by Mr W. P. O'Brien, CB (Assistant Commissioner), Upon Certain Selected Districts in Counties Carlow, Cork, Clare, Kerry, Kildare, Kilkenny, King's, Limerick, Queen's, Tipperary, Waterford, Wexford, and Wicklow, With Summary Report Prefixed*, PP, 1893–4, XXXVII, part 1, p 169, report on Kanturk (County Cork). Also see *Irish Peasant*, 28 April 1906, p 6 and "M.G.", *Irish Nation*, 13 February 1909, n.p.

creameries.²⁷ The *Irish Nation* pointed out that farmers' daughters would resist the time and labour constraints imposed upon them in the factories.²⁸ This argument is deceptive, however, because few farmers' daughters were given employment in creameries. The IAOS defended raising female unemployment by advising farmers to calculate the economic value of the time of their daughters. When a farmer learned about the value of time

then he will be able to judge more truly what the creamery system means; where the cream from 1,000 farms is churned in two churns instead of 1,000, and where two or three girls do the work of many hundreds, and the selling of tons of butter is done at less cost of time and money than the selling of pounds by individuals, and more important, perhaps, still, where you have only one good quality instead of 1,000 of all sorts.²⁹

In a labour-surplus economy, such reasoning only prolonged the debates.

Women were under-represented within the creamery labour structure. None of the twenty-seven creameries and dairy societies examined in the Registry of Friendly Societies had a woman on a managing committee.³⁰ Female shareholders were also rare. They were usually women who had taken over the shares after the death of their husbands. Single women frequently transferred their shares to their husband after marriage.³¹ Only 6 to 9 per cent

of shareholders in the Ballyrashane Co-operative Agricultural Dairy Society (County Derry) between 1908 and 1924 were women.³² Table 2 has been constituted from lists of members found within the Registry papers in Dublin.³³

TABLE 2
Percentage of Shareholders who were female in Creamery or Dairy Societies Registry of Friendly Societies, Dublin

File Number	Area	Year	Percentage Female
153	Tipperary	1916	3
371	Roscommon	1919	4
924	Donegal	1914	5
1172	Limerick	1919	5
1172	Limerick	1916	6
972	Kilkenny	1919	6
152	Tipperary	1916	6
638	Monaghan	1916	8
638	Monaghan	1919	8
280	Mayo	1914	8
109	Kerry	1916	9
774	Caven	1916	10
1097	Limerick	1919	15
230	Tipperary	1919	16
693	Cork	1915	27

With the exception of the last three societies, these statistics show the low representation of women in dairy societies. The last three societies in Limerick, Tipperary and Cork seem to show a large proportion of female shareholders. However, these societies were the only ones which set out to encourage membership by dealing in eggs and poultry as well as in milk and butter. The larger proportion of female shareholders in these societies was a function of their role as collectors and sellers of eggs.³⁴

²⁷ Ibid, p 198, report by W P O'Brien on Cashel; *Irish Homestead* (hereafter *IH*), 15 June 1901, p 407, report on Killeagh; and throughout the reports on co-operative meetings in the *IH*.

²⁸ "M.G.", *Irish Nation*, 13 February 1909, n.p.

²⁹ Arthur S Laough, *Irish Technical Journal*, 1, December 1903, p 142.

³⁰ The following creameries and dairy societies were examined at the Registry of Friendly Societies: Dublin, Pettigo, Killowen, Centenary, Poles, Mayo Abbey, St John's, Drumholme, Moycartkey, Ardrahan, Ballyhadereen, Kill, Kilnaleck, Kiltoghert, Lower Ormond, Toher, Kildimo, Thurles, Ballinfull, Ballinode, Busna, Inver, Bruree, Corcaghan, Newtownards, Ballinaglera, and Bennettsbridge. I have detailed accounts for all these societies. They were chosen because they were the only societies for which detailed information existed. Thus, they represent 'successful' societies. Also see signatures to the rules of the Monaghan Co-operative Creamery in 1900, in Gerr Dunne, *Town of Monaghan Co-op The First Eighty Years*, Monaghan 1983, n.p.

³¹ For example, see letters of Eliza Robinson and Ellen Convoys in the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (hereafter PRONI), D3076/BA/1, papers of the Deepark Co-operative Agricultural and Dairy Society Ltd, Glenarm (County Antrim).

³² PRONI T3132/BA/1 and 2, Minute Book of the Ballyrashane Co-operative Agricultural and Dairy Society, Ltd, Coleraine (County Derry), 28 February 1908 to 17 April 1924. Note the scarcity of female shareholders in the list in PRONI D3076/BA/1, for the Deepark Co-operative and Dairy Society Ltd, Glenarm (County Antrim).

³³ I have only included those lists which consistently give both forename and surname.

³⁴ See my argument in Joanna Bourke, 'Women and Poultry in Ireland, 1891-1914', *Irish Hist Stud*, xxv, May 1987, pp 293-310.

Few women were employed in creameries. A photograph in the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland shows a male dairy-maker and all-male staff. Men sit and stand around carts stacked with cans delivering milk. The only females in the photograph are two small girls with pails, obviously waiting to buy skim milk for the family.³⁵ In the twenty-seven creameries examined in detail, eleven hired no women and the remainder employed one or two. The societies hiring no women were scattered throughout the sample – as likely to be found in Tipperary and Cork as in Leitrim and Roscommon. Most creameries hired more than two men. Creameries had to be significantly larger to warrant the employment of another dairymaid, while new male workers might be required after only a slight increase in production. Furthermore, the larger a creamery, the more likely they were to prefer men to perform the functions previously designated to women. In part, a technological argument is valid here. Heavier machinery necessary in a very large creamery required ‘male’ strength.

I do not think that in a large creamery a woman could do the work as effectively as a man. Two women might. I think this is the reason there has been a tendency on the part of creameries that have a large output, to replace women by men. The management would naturally say that it would be better to pay a man once and a half the salary of a woman, than to pay two women their salaries for the work that only one woman previously did. That, and the fact that the work is heavy, that the physical labour is heavy, accounts for it [the decline of female employment in creameries].³⁶

Technological arguments have their weaknesses. Even where physical strength was no prerequisite (such as in managerial posts) women were excluded. Photographs show groups of ‘Creamery Managers in Training’

– all male.³⁷ Of course, these patterns should not be exaggerated. A distinction must be drawn between creameries and blending societies. Miss Eustace was manageress of the Drumlease Co-operative *Blending Society*.³⁸ Conventional creameries (as opposed to blending cooperatives) were reluctant to employ female manageresses. In 1899, the Erne Co-operative Dairy Society was the first full-scale creamery to accept a woman on its committee.³⁹ In 1898, replying to a question from a female reader as to whether women were eligible to become creamery managers, the editor of the co-operative newspaper, *Irish Homestead*, warned that the work was ‘exceedingly laborious’ and hardly suited to anyone not willing to ‘rough it with a vengeance’.⁴⁰ In 1905, the editor was still arguing that, although women were dairy instructresses, ‘we have not heard so far that any of them were daring enough to visit creameries and see that the managers kept them in proper order.’ Similarly, they had not heard of women being employed by creameries to travel and solicit orders for butter.⁴¹

III

The Registers of Cowkeepers, Dairymen and Purveyors of Milk provide another way of measuring the extent of female participation in dairying. Although some local districts anticipated the nationwide legislation by as much as eight years,⁴² in 1907 the Local Government Board for Ireland issued regulations imposing compulsory registration of all dairies, cowsheds and milk shops in an attempt to stamp out disease and raise standards of cattle, milk

³⁷ *IH*, 17 March 1906, p 203.

³⁸ *IH*, 1 January 1898, p 890.

³⁹ *IH*, 12 March 1899, p 228.

⁴⁰ *IH*, 4 June 1898, p 482.

⁴¹ *IH*, 6 January 1905, p 13.

⁴² For example, *Larne Rural District. Regulations Made by the Larne Rural District Council With Respect to Dairies, Cow Sheds, and Milk Shops, in the Rural District of Larne, Carrickfergus, 1900*, in PRONI LA 44/1E/1.

³⁵ PRONI D3057/ib/2, photograph of creamery.

³⁶ Evidence by Mr O’Connell, ‘Commission on Technical Education, Typescript of Evidence, 1927’, Fifth Instalment, no page numbers but 3–4 pages into the evidence given by Mr J Mahony, Agricultural Instructor in County Clare and Chairman of the DATI Officers’ Organisations, no. 48–9, in the National Library of Ireland.

and butter.⁴³ The 'vexations' connected with registration caused many farmers to give up selling milk, while others simply ignored the legislation and hoped for a benevolent inspector.⁴⁴ Despite these biases, the registers give us some indication of the proportion of female owners of dairy cows and sellers of dairy products, at least in the north of Ireland (see Table 3). I have examined four complete registers: Enniskillen Rural District (County Fermanagh); Newcastle Urban County District (County Down); Strabane No. 1 Rural District (County Tyrone); and Lisburn Rural District (County Antrim). Women made up a small proportion of registered dairy-owners in all districts except in the Urban County District of Newcastle where women would own a couple of cows in order to sell the milk in the city. Women owned fewer cows than men, and their average herd size increased more slowly than their male counterparts.

TABLE 3
Women Registered as Cowkeepers, 'Dairymen', or Purveyors of Milk as a Percentage of All Persons Registered and Average Number of Cows Kept by People Registered

Area and Date	Percentage Female	Average Number of Cows owned by		
		Women	Men	Number
Enniskillen				
1912-13	13.2	4.9	5.2	136
1930	13.4	5.7	6.0	178
Newcastle				
1908-12	27.9	1.8	3.1	43
1921-23	21.4	2.2	4.7	28
Strabane				
1910	9.6	5.2	8.5	208
1933	7.2	5.8	7.6	125
Lisburn				
1908-12	19.8	6.6	18.8	131

Public debate about the hours and conditions of work of women in creameries

⁴³ Particularly tuberculosis – their legislation was tied in very strongly with the Tuberculosis Prevention (Ireland) Act, 1908.

⁴⁴ *IH*, 20 April 1912, p 309 and the Reports of the Committees of the Newtownards Rural District Council esp 22 October 1909, 1 December 1909, and 17, 18 and 27 December 1909 in PRONI LA 61/3c/1.

further weakened the position of the few women in this industry. The Factory Acts which restricted the employment of women came at the same time as accusations of sweated female labour in creameries and dairies. At the Third Annual General Conference of delegates from cooperative dairy and agricultural societies, R A Anderson spoke about the need to lobby the Home Secretary to exempt creameries from the general rules regarding female labour.⁴⁵ For the first time, the IAOS was able to turn criticism levelled at their creameries on its head: instead of the IAOS reducing female employment through establishing creameries, governmental legislation, they claimed, had blocked their attempts to employ women in the creameries.

If the Factory Acts were strictly enforced, it would be impossible to employ women at all in creameries.⁴⁶

Factory and workshop legislation bore so heavily on creamery work as virtually to penalise the employment of young girls under the only conditions on which it was, in most cases, practicable to provide them with occupation in creameries.⁴⁷

The IAOS received considerable sympathy for their arguments. Even *The Times* referred to Irish dairymaids, with Horace Plunkett's deputation to the Home Secretary pointing out that the Factory Acts meant that around 600 dairymaids would have to be dismissed and that women in training at the Munster Dairy School would have to emigrate to find employment, receiving wide coverage.⁴⁸ Lady Frances Balfour on 13 July 1901 joined the appeals, writing to the *Irish Homestead* on behalf of the Freedom of Labour Defence League.

To the Lord's Day Observance Committee it may seem immoral to do any work on Sunday, or it may only be immoral in their eyes to work for hire on that day; but how have they solved the problem of paid domestic service in which the duty of preparing and

⁴⁵ R A Anderson, *IAOS Annual General Report 1898*, Dublin, 1899, appendix D, p 53.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p 53.

⁴⁷ *IH*, 18 October 1902, p 813.

⁴⁸ *The Times*, 2 July 1901, p 3.

preserving food is as important on Sundays as on week-days? Is there not a tendency in specialising of this kind, to overlook the true balance of things – to put all weight of immorality on the side of a supposed breach of Sunday observance by Irish Dairymaids, and nothing at all on the domestic service side of Sabbath-breaking for wages in their own homes?⁴⁹

Through a committee appointed by the Irish creamery proprietors, the legislation was amended to allow women and young persons to be employed between 6 am and 9 am.⁵⁰ Creamery managers and co-operative officials argued, however, that this new Order still gave ‘a quite insufficient time for the performance of absolutely necessary work in connection with the business of a dairymaid in a creamery’.⁵¹ By further amendment, women were allowed to be employed on Sundays for three consecutive hours at any time between 6 am and 7 pm that the manager should choose.⁵² Even so, prosecutions continued, as creamery managers employed dairymaids outside of the three hours they had fixed.⁵³ These infringements were treated lightly by the magistrates: often the managers simply received a caution. Opposed to any form of restrictive legislation, creamery managers continued to complain.

The special exemption allowed under Section 42 of this Act [Factory and Workshops Act] is availed of by a good many creameries, including ourselves, and as we found it impossible to do the necessary work during the three hours on Sunday, we arranged to have one of our dairymaids work from 7 am to 10 am and the other from 9 am to 12 noon, thereby giving ourselves two hours longer for working, and giving one of our dairymaids a decent opportunity of attending early prayers and the other late. The Factory Inspector will not allow this, maintaining that only one period of employment can be worked by all the women, and all at the same time, nor will the

Government allow different meal hours for women and young persons. We have been summoned for this Sunday working, and convicted.⁵⁴

The losers in this legislation and the debate surrounding it were female dairymaids. The Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction (DATI) listed eighteen creameries which could not reduce operations requiring a dairymaid to only three hours on Sundays. To continue usual levels of production, they were going to replace their female dairymaid with men. They listed another fifteen creameries which had ‘recently’ replaced female dairymaids with male operators.⁵⁵ There is no reason to think that these lists fully represent the extent of the substitution. Larger dairies were more likely to be affected than smaller ones. Creameries were likely to be more affected in summer than winter. Extracts from the creamery instructor’s notes tell the same story:

Most of the creameries have solved this by employing males. Three hours are not long enough on Sundays in summer.

In the North West district women are not employed at work on creameries. In the South West I consider that five hours are required to carry out the work during the summer months.

It would be impossible for female buttermakers in large creameries to get through the work in three hours on Sundays.⁵⁶

The agitation came to little. During the war, the legislation was allowed to lapse.

IV

Given the importance of the dairying industry and the large number of reforming

⁴⁹ *IH*, 13 July 1901, pp 463–4.

⁵⁰ Statutory Rules and Orders 1902, No. 465, of 2 June 1902.

⁵¹ *IH*, 18 October 1902, p 813, and *IH*, 29 August 1903, p 715.

⁵² Statutory Rules and Orders 1902, No 465, Factory and Workshop – Creameries. Order of the Secretary of State, Dated 23 October 1903, Granting Special Exemptions: – Creameries.

⁵³ *IH*, 27 August 1904, p 703, concerning Effin Co-Operative Dairy Society; *IH*, 18 October 1902, p 813; *IH*, 29 August 1903, p 715; and D Meehan (manager of Piltown Co-operative Dairy), *IH*, 1 October 1910, pp 816–7.

⁵⁴ D Meehan, *IH*, 1 October 1910, pp 816–7.

⁵⁵ From the papers of the DATI in the Public Record Office of Ireland, Mss A13881/16 and A20703/19.

⁵⁶ DATI Papers in the PRO AG1 A20703/19. All these reports were confidential reports from Instructors of Dairying. More could be cited. Frequently the name of the Instructor has been omitted but the second quotation has been taken from a letter from Thomas Scott (dairy instructor in Liverfovell) and the final quotation came from a report by A Alcorn (dairy instructor in Ballymullen, Tralee). Also see the letters between the secretary of the DATI and Eliot F May (Inspector of Factories), at the same location.

institutions dedicated to agriculture, it is not surprising that the dissemination of knowledge concerning scientific dairying was a central policy. The revival in the dairy industry was actively promoted by governmental organizations. The DATI encouraged the scientific breeding of dairy cattle, instigated schemes to improve tillage and the production of dry feeding stuffs, and supplied farmers with the latest information on farm improvements. They inspected dairies and provided credit for the purchase of equipment and the construction of dairies and creameries. Each year the Committee of Agriculture spend over £3000 on butter improvement schemes. The classes in practical dairying were the most significant of their reforms.⁵⁷ Butter-making classes were a response to popular fears that standards of housekeeping would drop as women ceased making butter.⁵⁸ The educational schemes were run by County Committees who appointed instructresses and supplied them with equipment. The 'school' moved around districts at regular intervals. The cost of the classes was paid out of the DATI's joint fund. Between 1901 and 1912, the number of instructresses increased from one to thirty-three.⁵⁹

It is difficult to assess the effect of these classes. In November 1904 the dairy instructress in Dromore (County Longford) had fewer than ten pupils.⁶⁰ The classes were

accused of attracting only the better dairy-workers. There was a fundamental contradiction in these educational schemes: why, if 'home dairying is a thing of the past', was all this money being spent on itinerant instructresses?⁶¹

In addition to itinerant instruction, colleges training women in farm work were established. At first, it seemed as though the colleges would promote men at the expense of women in their training schemes. The Albert Agricultural College had provided a special dairying course of women in 1883.⁶² By 1895 a course for creamery managers was started – largely attended by men. Finally, when the College was transferred from the Commissioners of National Education to the DATI by the Act of 1899, it was decided to discontinue all courses for women. They claimed that the system of teaching a course in dairying for women and a course in agriculture for men in separate halves of the year was expensive, duplicated staff and led to inadequate training of the men.⁶³ However, female students were not left uncatered for. At the Munster Institute classes for women continued.⁶⁴ Applications for admission increased each year. For applicants, a period of over a year elapsed between application and acceptance.⁶⁵ Students came from all over the country. For example, in 1902 although 37 per cent of all students came from Cork, 9 per cent came from both Cavan and Limerick, 5 per cent from Kerry, 4 per cent from Clare, and 3 per cent from each of the counties of Kilkenny, Galway, Sligo, Derry and Kildare.⁶⁶ In 1908 the Ulster Dairy School at Loughry (County Tyrone)

⁵⁷ The DATI was not the first organization to institute dairying courses for the 'ordinary farm woman'. On a much smaller scale, individuals and philanthropic organizations had been providing local courses. For instance, clergy in several areas taught their female parishioners new dairying techniques: see *DATI. Departmental Committee on the Irish Butter Industry. Minutes of Evidence, Appendices and Index*, PP, 1910, VIII, p 476.

⁵⁸ The 'discipline' of buttermaking stems from the need to keep the place where the milk is stored and churned exceptionally clean. Reformers feared that without this economic incentive, farm women would become careless about household cleanliness. *Royal Commission on Congestion in Ireland. Appendix to the Ninth Report of the Commission, Minutes of Evidence (Taken in County Mayo, 21st August to 3rd September, 1907), and Documents Relating Thereto*, PP, 1908, XLI, pp 715–6, evidence by Rev. John McDonnell, representing the National Directory of the United Irish League.

⁵⁹ *DATI. Fifth Annual General Report of the Department, for the Year 1904–1905*, PP, 1906, XXIII, p 320 and *DATI. Twelfth Annual General Report of the Department, for the Year 1911–1912*, PP, 1912–13, XII, p 575.

⁶⁰ *IH*, 12 November 1904, pp 95–6, on Dromore (County Longford).

⁶¹ 'Dairymaid', *IH*, 7 October 1905, p 743.

⁶² At different times, this college was called the Glasnevin Model Farm and the Albert National Agricultural Training Institute.

⁶³ *DATI. Report of the Departmental Committee of Inquiry into the Provisions of the Agricultural and Technical Instruction (Ireland) Act, 1899*, PP, 1907, XVII, p 828.

⁶⁴ Also called the Cork Model Farm.

⁶⁵ *DATI. Seventh Annual General Report of the Department, for 1906–1907*, PP 1908, XIV, pp 617–8.

⁶⁶ *Munster Dairy School and Agricultural Institute. Cork. Report of the Governors and Statement of Accounts for 1902*, Cork, 1903, p 10.

accepted its first pupils. This institute was similar to the Munster Institute, teaching dairying, poultry-keeping, cooking, laundry-work, sewing and cottage gardening. However, between 1905 and 1913, the Munster Institute was the only training centre in Ireland for instructresses in dairying.⁶⁷

Other schools were established for farm women. With financial help from the DATI, communities of nuns set up small schools training women in dairying, poultry-keeping, and domestic work. The DATI helped establish the schools, paid the teachers' salaries and contributed towards the cost of pupils. The most successful schools run by nuns were the residential schools at Portumna (County Galway), Westport (County Mayo), Ramsgrange (County Wexford), Claremorris (County Mayo), Swinford (County Mayo), and Clifden (County Galway) rather than the non-residential schools at Loughglinn (County Roscommon) and Beneden (County Clare). The DATI also helped private individuals to set up schools to train women in farm work (such as the school at Killashandra, County Cavan). However, the success of these schools depended more on their role in teaching domestic arts than on the dissemination of new dairying skills.⁶⁸

These aspects were revealed most strongly in the debates about emigration and creameries. By reducing female employment, creameries were accused of increasing female emigration. Furthermore, since women did not have to show proof that they were going onto farms as the men attending the Albert Agricultural College had to ('because a girl cannot very well guarantee to get a husband who is a farmer'), some of the female students used the school as a stepping stone to emigration. The reformers perceived that there was only

one solution. It was unrealistic to find remunerative employment in Ireland for graduates of the school. Demand for their services was not increasing and the days of roving instructresses were nearing the end. Instead, women were to be trained as skilled farm-wives. This aim was most explicitly carried out in the itinerant dairying classes and in the Schools of Rural Domestic Economy, but even the Munster Dairy School determined that its students should not become preoccupied with waged labour. Their aim was not so much to train dairy servants as to train women to share the labour of their household's farm in a more efficient manner. These women required training in domestic arts such as cookery, laundry and needlework and, from 1880, this was taught by a Ladies' Committee. Between 1880 and 1901, this committee spent almost one-fifth as much money promoting housewifery as the Governors spent on experiments on water in butter, organizing butter shows throughout the country, bestowing prizes on pupils, paying salaries to lecturers and so on.⁶⁹ This committee was continued when the DATI took control of the Munster Dairy School.

In the early years, the reforming organizations complained about men's lack of interest in dairying. It was 'women's work'. Professor Carroll commented,

One of the principal difficulties that had to be overcome in the establishing of dairy instruction in the country is the small amount of interest taken in the subject by the male population; indeed, about the period of establishing the Munster Dairy School, a man who knew anything about practical dairy work was looked upon almost with contempt.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ After 1913, the Ulster Dairy School began providing similar training for women.

⁶⁸ *Munster Dairy School and Agricultural Institute. Cork. Report of the Governors and Statement of Accounts for 1902*, Cork, 1903, p. 9.

⁶⁹ *Royal Commission on Congestion in Ireland. Appendix to Fourth Report. Minutes of Evidence (Taken in London, 14th to 23rd February, 1907), and Documents Relating Thereto*, PP, 1907, XXXVI, p. 65, evidence by Professor J R Campbell. The more popular argument was that creameries encouraged emigration by inflating the number of unemployed females of emigrating age groups, see *IH*, 25 May 1901, pp. 336–7.

⁷⁰ Professor Carroll, 'A Brief Account of the Progress of Dairy Instruction in Ireland', Appendix 4, DATI. *Departmental Committee on the Irish Butter Industry. Minutes of Evidence, Appendices and Index*, PP, 1910, VIII, p. 476.

For this reason women were trained as instructresses, even though men were moved into all prestigious positions and all managerial posts. Even the Commissioners of National Education who were responsible for Glasnevin before it was taken over by the DATI had been concerned with getting *men* managerial posts in dairying. An 1885 Report of the Commissioners of National Education expounded,

As a rule, in this country, this important industry [dairying] is carried on by the female portion of the farmer's family, the men knowing very little of the subject. The women, confined to the narrow circle of the home, without time for reading or opportunity of seeing improved methods, and frequently having no knowledge of the various qualities of butter required for the market, could scarcely be expected to contribute much towards improvement in butter-making. It should not be considered that it is desirable that women should be superseded by men in the work of the dairy. The largest portion of dairy work is eminently suited to women, but, taking into account the vast importance of the industry, and that intelligent direction in the dairy would be useful, the question as to how far the training of men in dairy management is advisable is deserving of serious consideration.⁷¹

That 'question' had been decided by the following year. The Commissioners introduced at the Albert Institute the first course in dairy management for men. Their policy of pushing men into managerial positions was continued by the DATI, which went a step further in promoting men at *every* level of dairy work.

V

This policy created strained relations in the 'real world' of creamery management. Creamery managers and dairymaids were frequently antagonistic. Women 'considered that they "knew all about it", and so despised any attempts at teaching by men'.⁷² The most detailed exposition of the tension is found in a letter by 'Mejerist'.

⁷¹ Quoted in *ibid*, p 476.

⁷² *Ibid*, p 476.

It is unfortunate that in a good many of our creameries, young intelligent men are installed as managers, who, through lack of sufficient training and experience under expert tuition, are subject to the anomaly of being subordinated to the dairymaid in the primary department of his work . . . It therefore behoves us to make all our young, intelligent creamery candidates pay, first and foremost, attention to the dairymaid's duties, particularly the handling of the cream, so that he may be in a position to assume full responsibility for the proper and efficient carrying out of her work, as well as that of the rest, and that he may be able to dictate instead of being dictated to, and also if necessary that he himself may be capable of performing the work without having to receive instructions first from the dairymaid.⁷³

Other, more general, changes were driving women out of dairying. In counties like Wicklow, Carlow, Kildare and Longford (as well as most of the other eastern countries) the number of milch cows in each county declined by as much as one-quarter between 1891 and 1911. The practice of the wives and daughters of male farm workers being employed as milkers during the summer season remained undisturbed in many areas, but increasingly this work was being performed on large farms hiring a number of labourers, rather than on the small family herd.

Crucial to all the reforms were technological advances. The invention, in 1878, of a centrifuge 'separator' capable of efficiently separating cream from milk provided the chief way to improve farmhouse and factory butter-making. Here, as well as in the educational schemes, the DATI attempted to resolve the contradiction between home and factory dairy-making. They promoted dairy equipment at every level of dairy organization. Beginning in Cork in 1902, small farmers could purchase hand separators with the help of loans from the

⁷³ 'Majerist', *IH*, 20 January 1905, p 52. The letter received a reply from 'Munster Manager' in *IH*, 27 January 1906, pp 75-6. Also see Public Record Office of Ireland, Irish Co-Operative Organisation Society (ICOS) files, 1088/5/4, report on the Achonry Creamery by R S Tarrant, dated 10 November 1902.

Committees.⁷⁴ Instructresses sold equipment – especially thermometers – for buttermaking at reduced cost to women in their classees.⁷⁵ Dairy societies and creameries also benefited from departmental loans amounting to almost five thousand pounds for the purpose of erecting pasteurizing plants. Twenty-six loans were sanctioned, with low interest rates and repayment schemes spread over five years.⁷⁶ The DATI also encouraged creameries by schemes whereby instructors visited creameries, policed their registration, provided courses of instruction for creamery managers, awarded Creamery Managers' Certificates, held Surprise Butter Competitions and conducted experiments.⁷⁷

Creamery promoters had to face the problem of unemployed wives, sisters and daughters. Initially, they planned that women made redundant because of creameries would be given alternative employment. However, policies designed to develop alternative industries failed and, in many areas, were never started. The Reverend Terence C Connolly of the Manorhamilton Rural Council (County Leitrim) confessed,

I was one of the men who committed what some call the sin of doing what I could to start the co-operative creameries. I spent a good many hard days at it. The idea was where a girl was deprived of the industry of churning she would be turned over at once to a cottage industry like lacemaking or sprigging or something of that kind. I think that matter has not been sufficiently followed up, simply because after the Department of Agriculture was started, those

who had asserted it before said, 'There is enough money now; we will do nothing.'⁷⁸

Reformers, creamery managers and larger dairy farmers hastened to reassure critics, asserting that although creameries denied farm women an important area of productive employment, 'the farmer's wife has enough employment to keep her out of mischief without making butter.'⁷⁹ George F Trench reasoned

Another objection to creameries is that women of the farms have less to do. This is the ordinary complaint that follows the introduction of any kind of machinery in field or factory; but the wants of men are so many that the female part of the farm family have abundance of occupations with rearing children, milking, feeding calves, pigs and fowl, keeping everything clean and tidy, needlework, etc.⁸⁰

In particular, poultry-rearing and increased domestic work were promoted as the main ways in which women could occupy their time.⁸¹ The muscular arms of the butter-churning maid will give way to 'a slim young miss looking after poultry'.

Our anti-co-operators would have it that if a woman wasn't sweated over a churn she has nothing to do which is a fit and womanly employment for her. We say that the more she has to do with the churn the worst for Ireland, and the more she has to say to the poultry yard the better for Ireland. These silly journalists seem to think that labour-saving machinery is bad for a country and bad for the farmer. We, on the contrary, assert that any device which will enable four hands at a creamery to do work which 100 women were engaged in is good for the country, because those 100 wives do not emigrate and their

⁷⁴ John Donovan, *Economic History of Livestock in Ireland*, Cork, 1940, p 327. The 1902 loans were limited to Cork farmers. Even after this date, most of the loans were accepted by farmers in Cork. For instance, in 1907 Cork farmers accepted fifty-four of the eighty-one loans.

⁷⁵ DATI. *Third Annual General Report of the Department, for 1902–1903*, PP, 1904, XVI, pp 458–9.

⁷⁶ DATI. *Report of the Departmental Committee on Agricultural Credit in Ireland*, PP, 1914, XIII, p 316.

⁷⁷ DATI. *Seventh Annual General Report of the Department, for 1906–1907*, PP, 1908, XIV, pp 653–4.

⁷⁸ *Royal Commission on Congestion in Ireland. Appendix to the Sixth Report, Minutes of Evidence (Taken in County Sligo and County Leitrim, 17th to 27th April 1907) and Documents Relating Thereto*, PP, 1908, XXXIX, p 928, evidence by Rev. Terence C Connolly representing Manorhamilton Rural Council and the fishermen of the Leitrim coast.

⁷⁹ *Ark. (The Official Farmers' Magazine). Journal Devoted to the Interests of Cattle, Poultry, Pigs, and Farming (hereafter Ark)*, vi, February 1914, p 7.

⁸⁰ *Royal Commission on Congestion, Appendix to the Eighth Report. Minutes of Evidence (Taken in Kerry and Cork, 3rd to 19th July, 1907) and Documents Relating Thereto*, PP, 1908, XLI, p 129, evidence by George F Trench. Also *IH*, 7 February 1903, p 102.

⁸¹ *IH*, 29 September 1906, p 790. Also see *IH*, 9 March 1895, p 6 for an address by R A Anderson to a meeting of tenant farmers and others about setting up a co-operative dairy in Tralee and the *IAOS Annual Report 1897*, Dublin, 1898, appendix L, 'Report of the Annual General Meeting 1897', comments by Thomas Patrick Gill, p 58.

husbands . . . but they now make the farm more profitable by devoting their spare time to poultry-keeping, by which Ireland gains as much as it does by its butter production.⁸²

Although the extension of poultry-rearing was frequently thrown up as an alternative occupation for redundant butter-makers, another argument was more prevalent. The removal of butter-making from female work-schemes left women more time to devote to their 'proper' duties – housework. At a large meeting of the Dromore Co-operative Home Industries Society in July 1904, the political economist and ardent supporter of co-operation, Father T A Finlay, asserted that the diversion of female labour into housework was ample justification for the existence of creameries.⁸³ Lady Londonderry at the annual meeting of the Ulster Branch of the IAOS praised the introduction of creameries for leaving women more time for recreation and their 'proper domestic duties'.⁸⁴ A 'County Cork Woman' argued that freeing women from butter-making was the only way to improve the 'semi-barbarous condition' of rural homesteads. She suggested that home-buttermaking had led to the 'deterioration of the breed of women and children': the transfer of this 'drudgery' to creameries 'saved a needless sacrifice of life, and has protected both mother and child from ill-health'.⁸⁵ Critics of the creamery movement consisted of urban journalists: rural households were less likely to disparage the transfer of the energies of women to housewifery.⁸⁶ The success of the farm depended on the housekeeping skills of farm women:

Take the man with an income of £50 a year and an unskilled wife: all he was getting out of that income would not represent, perhaps, as much of the

real advantages of living, of the conveniences and necessities of life, as his neighbour with a skilled wife was getting from £25 a year. For that reason, it was an advantage to the farmers that the women were set free from the rather strenuous task of churning to devote themselves to the study of their proper business in the home.⁸⁷

Related to this stress on housework was the response of the co-operative societies to criticisms that creameries denied children milk.⁸⁸ The creamery was satirized as 'a horrible ghoulish monster' snatching milk out of the lips of starving children and frantic parents.⁸⁹ This argument, although repeated constantly by the anti-creamery faction, was treated with contempt in IAOS publications. The Vice-Regal Commission on Irish Milk Supplies showed that creameries could not be held responsible for the shortage of milk. The Dairy and Cowsheds Order was more to blame since registration and inspections reduced the number of farmers willing to sell milk.⁹⁰ However, the argument periodically recurred because of its critique of female competence in the home: if Irish women were better housekeepers, they would welcome the opportunity to devote more time to such activities as childcare and would wrest milk for their dependants out of the grasp of creameries.

VI

Of course, many women continued making butter. Not all areas were provided with

⁸² *IH*, 27 March 1909, p 242. I have examined the poultry industry in 'Women and Poultry in Ireland, 1890–1914', *Irish Hist Stud*, 99, 1987, pp 293–310.

⁸³ *IH*, 30 July 1904, pp 622–31.

⁸⁴ *IH*, 23 April 1910, p 345.

⁸⁵ *IH*, 11 May 1901, p 303.

⁸⁶ *IH*, 18 May 1901, pp 317–8.

⁸⁷ *IH*, 22 June 1912, p 510, speech by Father T A Finlay to the Cavan District Conference. Also see *Ark*, vi, February 1914, p 7.

⁸⁸ *Royal Commission on Congestion in Ireland. First Appendix to the Seventh Report. Minutes of Evidence (Taken in Ireland, 16th May to 11th June 1907), and Documents Relating Thereto*, PP, 1908, XL, pp 236–7, evidence by P E Mallon of Doobally (County Down), representing the Enniskillen Rural District Council No.2 and Doobally branch of the United Irish League; *Leader*, 14 March 1908, p 58; and *Leader*, 21 March 1908, p 73.

⁸⁹ *IH*, 4 May 1907, p 347. Also *IH*, 2 May 1908, p 349; *IH*, 16 May 1908, p 388; Sarsfield Kerrigan, *Leader*, 7 March 1908, p 39 and 28 March 1908, p 91; a report on a speech of John Clancy, in *IH*, 13 June 1908, pp 470–3 where he links shortages of milk to the creameries and says that this is why the people drink too much tea and porter in the fields; *IH*, 17 January 1914, pp 45–6; and Harold Barbour, 'The Work of the IAOS', pamphlet reprinted from the *IH*, Dublin, 1910, p 6.

⁹⁰ *Vice-Regal Committee on the Irish Milk Supplies, Appendix to the Final Report of the Irish Milk Commissioners*, PP, 1914, xxxvi, pp 669 ff.

creameries and many women churned for family consumption using the weekend milk supplies.⁹¹ During World War One, Irish women took up butter-churning again on a large scale – resulting in a massive decline in the amount of milk taken to creameries.⁹² The dairy industry, however, had changed. Farming households were more likely to buy butter than to make it.⁹³ This change is indicated by the increasing amounts of butter being bought from the creamery by the milk suppliers, suggesting that these suppliers were no longer retaining some of the milk to churn at home for household consumption.⁹⁴ Women training in the dairy schools were liable to find that training increased their wages to such an extent that demand for their labour declined as farmers became conscious that seasonal labour requirements favoured the employment of men who could work at other occupations when milk production was low (that is, during winter). If women made butter, they were more likely to be found as the solitary female in large dairies or creameries, overseen by male managers, than in their own homes. The home churn became a less prominent feature of the farm household. Women lost a dominant forum for discussing matters of community interest.⁹⁵ Less obviously, a tradition of folklore

and folkcharms fell into disuse. The ‘good people’ were not invoked in creameries. May morning charms, prayers and spells lost their efficacy: ‘The advent of the separator has, I fear, destroyed nearly all the poetry of these times, and with it the power of the butter witch.’⁹⁶ Butter-making had become ‘as scientific a business as brewing’ and women were moved out.⁹⁷

Both absolutely and relatively, female workloads in dairying were reduced, along with access to control over cash income. Organizations set up to revolutionize the rural community lamented the declining work opportunities for women but they decided that the Irish farm woman had enough work to do in looking after her family. In most cases, the reforms instigated by these organizations benefited the communities as a whole. The Irish dairy industry would have been significantly weaker without the rationalizations instigated by the DATI and the IAOS. But the adverse affects of the reforms fell disproportionately on the female members of the rural communities. No one said it as well as ‘Peper’ in the *Ark*:

Where is the maiden all forlorn
That milked the cow with crumpled horn?
She has gone to the town
Where she’s now holding down
A job as a skilful typewriter.⁹⁸

However, alternative employment for women in Ireland was declining. The skills of the milking maid were less likely to be appreciated in the towns and cities of Ireland, England or America, but were more valued when channelled into the home. Although Humphrey James’s story *Paddy’s Woman* was written around the same time as Denis Hurley’s letter at the beginning

⁹¹ *Royal Commission on Congestion in Ireland. Appendix to the Ninth Report, Minutes of Evidence (Taken in Mayo, 21st August to 3rd September, 1907)*, and *Documents Relating Thereto*, PP, 1908, xli, p 624, evidence by the Very Rev. Canon Humphrey O’Riordan; Mrs Maxwell (of Dungloe United Irishwomen, County Donegal), *IH*, 26 November 1910, pp 976–7; *Leader*, 28 March 1908, p 91, article by Sarsfield Kerrigan; and Mr C F Costello, manager of the Ballyhaise Creamery, *Commission of Inquiry into the Resources and Industries of Ireland. Minutes of Evidence. Pt. 1. City Hall Dublin, 2nd 3rd and 4th December 1919, Milk Production and Milk Products, Fisheries*, National Library of Ireland R10/11, p121.

⁹² DATI. *Report of the Departmental Commission on the Decline of Dairying in Ireland*, PP, 1920, IX, p 588.

⁹³ *Vice-Regal Committee on the Irish Milk Supplies, Appendix to the Final Report of the Irish Milk Commissioners*, PP, 1914, XXXVI, p 749, evidence by James Stewart of Strabane.

⁹⁴ Taken from an analysis of the dairy accounts in the Registry of Friendly Societies.

⁹⁵ For examples of the role played by groups of women meeting to churn or mix butter (‘choring’), see the interview of Mrs Dore (of County Limerick), aged sixty, interviewed by P Ward in January 1939, typescript in IFC, Mss 591, pp 484–6 and *IH*, 30 March 1895, p 53.

⁹⁶ R A Anderson, *IH*, 4 June 1904, p 469. For lengthy descriptions of the folklore and folkcharms associated with dairying, see the IFC, ie. Mss 80, collected by Padraig Mac Greive of Ballinalee, Edgeworthstown (County Longford), November 1929, pp 45–50, and Mss 1340, collected by James G Delaney from James Dermody of Columcillen parish (County Longford), aged 54, collected in the 1950s, pp 41–2.

⁹⁷ *IH*, 22 June 1912, p 497.

⁹⁸ *Ark*, iii, December 1913, p 1

of this article, James showed more foresight by identifying the element which was to become dominant by the first decades of the twentieth century. Paddy and Barney discuss the marriage prospects of Titia, a skilful dairymaid:

“And she’s as good as she’s nice and clean.”
 “Them that’ll get her, will have a bargain, for if she’s so nice and clean, and can sing so well, she can hardly be expected to milk the cows and make the butter,” said Paddy, laughing.

“I’m thinking you and me’d be rich, Paddy,” said Barney, “if we had half the cows she could milk or make butter from – according to what Mickey Coulter, her mother’s servant boy, tells me. Besides, any steel of a girl can feed the pigs and wash the veshels [sic].”

“Ay, but not everyone of them can make it a pleasure for a neighbour to come into your house, and kaly at your fire.” said Pat.”

” Humphrey James, *Paddy’s Woman and Other Stories*, 1896, pp 107–8.

Notes and Comments

WINTER CONFERENCE 1990

The joint Winter Conference with the Historical Geography Research Group of the Institute of Historical Geographers was held on Saturday 1 December from 10.30 am to 4 pm at the Institute of Historical Research, Senate House, London. The theme was ‘Farmers and Landowners’ and the speakers were Dr C Dyer on ‘Farmers and Landlords in the Middle Ages’; Dr Sarah Wilmott on a title to be announced; Dr John Chapman on ‘Landownership and Enclosure’; and Professor Michael Thompson on ‘Business Elites and Land Purchase in the Nineteenth Century’. The conference fee is a modest £5 (cheques payable to the ‘British Agricultural History Society’) and should be sent to Dr Peter Dewey, Dept of History, Royal Holloway and Bedford New College, Egham Hill, Egham, Surrey TW20 0EX.

SPRING CONFERENCE 1991

The Society’s Spring Conference will be held at Chester College of Education, and the dates to keep clear in your diary are Monday 8 to Wednesday 10 April. Papers will be delivered by Dr Marjorie McIntosh, Professor John Beckett, Dr Ann Kusmaul, Professor R A Dodgshon, Dr Avner Offer, Dr Jean Birrell, and Dr Nick Higham who will also lead the afternoon excursion to Tatton Park. All individual members will receive a registration form well in advance, but further details can be obtained from the Secretary.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 1991

The 39th annual general meeting of the Society will be held at 9 am on Tuesday 9 April 1991 at Chester College of Education. Nomination forms for officers and members of the Executive Committee should be

returned to the Secretary no later than Friday 30 March 1991. Members are reminded that it was agreed at the 1986 AGM that those nominating candidates for the Executive Committee should supply a twenty-word statement about each candidate to be circulated at the AGM of the Society. Because of the rise in the printing and other costs of running the Society, expenditure is now greater than income and accumulated balances. Therefore, the Executive Committee will propose that the annual subscription for individual members be raised to £15 from 1 February 1992.

ATTENDANCE AT SPRING CONFERENCES

The Executive Committee are concerned that attendance over recent years has not been as large as in the past. Does this mean that members would prefer different sorts of conferences with different types of papers from those which we have become used to? The Committee is anxious to discover what members really want. So if you can suggest any ways to improve the conference and attract a larger audience please write to the Secretary now. All letters will be acknowledged and he will pass on your suggestions to the Executive Committee.

CALL FOR PAPERS

A Symposium on the History of Agriculture and the Environment will be held in the USA at the National Archives Building, Washington, DC, 19–22 June 1991. The symposium will be interdisciplinary in nature and will cover the topic of the history of agriculture and the environment as broadly conceived. Please send proposals of not more than two pages to: Douglas Helms, National Historian, Soil Conservation Service, PO Box 2890, Washington, DC 20013. Telephone: (202) 447-3766. Deadline for proposals was 31 December 1990.