



Hoard's Dairyman Farm

EDITORIAL COMMENT

WHAT'S YOUR DAIRY CO-OP WORTH TO YOU?

THOSE familiar with the experiences we've had at the Hoard's Dairyman Farm may wonder about our own co-op affiliation after reading the above editorial. We belonged to Alto Dairy Co-op when it was sold to Saputo earlier this year.

First, some history. We bottled and delivered our own milk until the late 1940s. For a few years, we shipped to privately owned Hawthorne Melody at nearby Whitewater, Wis. As the magazine's editors began to appreciate the potential of co-ops, we joined Golden Guernsey.

We had been a member of Golden Guernsey co-op and, later, Foremost Farms for nearly 50 years. We were happy with our membership and shared many similar perspectives on policy matters. However, we also were interested in cheese-yield pricing for our high-solids milk. When it appeared that it was not practical for our co-op to assemble and pay for high solids milk, we looked for alternatives.

We "shopped" our milk to three co-ops and one cheese plant. Alto offered cheese-yield pricing and appeared to be the best market for our milk. That was fall of 2004.

Having been sold to Saputo this spring, Alto has become the skeleton of a co-op, renamed AD Cooperative, that will exist only as long as needed. However, Saputo still provides cheese-yield pricing, plus a promised per-hundredweight premium for Alto patrons who continue to ship to Saputo for two years.

It was necessary for us to join a testing co-op in order to avoid federal order test-verification fees of 7 cents per hundredweight. We considered four alternatives but chose Manitowoc Milk Producers Cooperative (2 cents per hundredweight) primarily because of its membership in National Milk Producers Federation, contributions to the Cooperatives Working Together program, and other industry affiliations. (We continue to support CWT at the full 10-cent level. Also, we should acknowledge that the chairman of the Manitowoc co-op board is related to one of our editors).

We continually will investigate the pricing plans and services offered by dairy cooperatives serving southeastern Wisconsin. When our remaining Alto (Saputo) affiliation has run its course, our primary goal will be to join an industry-minded co-op that values high-solids milk.