Domesticated Farmers: Dairymen, Progressivism and the State

Ben Larson, History
Dr. Joel Sipress, Department of Social Inquiry

ABSTRACT

Dairy farmers in the age of commercialization faced a number of challenges unique among agricultural producers, the successful solutions to which increasingly came to involve the intervention of the state on the behalf of the dairy industry. The construction of this enduring alliance between dairy interests and the state came of age and flourished in the progressive era of American history, and the tumultuous transformation of thousands of average farmers into specialized, modern 'dairymen' is a clear manifestation of many of the key trends emphasized by historians of the era – some seemingly at odds with each other. In particular, the near century-long successful campaign for government intervention against margarine by dairy interests serves as the starkest illustration of the power of progressive agricultural politics in the hands of the dairymen, as a novel rhetoric of public health, pure food and scientific management served discriminatory, private interests in their campaign to enlist the support of the state. A brief historiographical tour of the robust debate over American progressivism will place the dairymen firmly in the progressive camp, as the key trends that historians have argued make-up the progressive movement – an optimistic sense of reform and of state intervention, a positive view of the potential for progress as a result of this intervention, a position in a novel middle class economically disposed to building close relationships with state activities, an epistemology of reform that privileges scientific and bureaucratic forms of knowledge creation, etc. – can be clearly glimpsed in the rise of the dairyman. Next, a history of the commercialization and specialization of dairy farming will demonstrate the specific pressures that have produced the progressive dairyman- with, most significantly, a strong disposition for successful state intervention on his behalf. And finally, a history of the dairy industry's campaign against margarine producers, and an evaluation of the key arguments made by dairymen, will demonstrate this campaign as the site par excellence of agricultural progressivism.

Introduction

In late February 1910 a U.S. District Court judge sentenced Chicago merchant William Broadwell to six years in Fort Leavenworth federal prison. The judge told the courtroom "it has been disclosed that probably not less than $15,000 and possibly more than $20,000 has been lost by the Unites States Government as a result of Mr. Broadwell's activities," and then proceeded to fine the middle class merchant the whole of the lower figure cited.[1] One Chicago newspaper described Broadwell's wife and child in attendance.[2] The judge also took the opportunity of the sentencing to order a national federal inquiry into the extent of the criminal activity of which the Chicago man was found to be a part – a vast criminal conspiracy that sold colored margarine in avoidance of a Federal tax.

Men like Broadwell were sent to prison as a result of a nearly century-long history of federal and state regulation of margarine, instigated by an elite group of dairy interests who formed an early and enduring relationship with the burgeoning American national and interventionist state. The campaign against margarine secured for dairymen a protected and privileged place in the marketplace for their products and helped galvanize the parallel establishment of a unique and uniquely powerful infrastructure of state resources explicitly for dairymen and the dairy industry, while serving as a kind of rallying call to the wider and deeper concern of elite dairymen, that of the transformation of unscientific dirt farmers with a few cows into modern dairymen – a kind of embodied ideal of scientific agriculture and progress. This Dairy-State compact would prove one of the earliest and most durable forms of the kinds of private interest group state capture that would come to dominate American formative years of industrial politics

[1] "Oleomargarine Man Jailed," *New York Times*, March 1, 1910.
[2] *Chicago Tribune*, February 28, 1910.

and the national state in the 20th century, according to some historians.[3] Federal Margarine regulation was debated and enacted twenty years before general Pure Food and Drug legislation was enthroned in 1906, and while the quickened pace of the development of scientific knowledge (particularly in this case, chemistry) and technological achievement of the era changed some of the content and shape of the debate, the terms, tactics and acceptable discourses of Progressive pure food and drug legislation were well rehearsed in the seminal debate about margarine and butter. That is, the rhetoric and programmatic expressions of this successful campaign of discriminatory state intervention - with its passionate and optimistic claims to the progressive potential of scientific knowledge applied to the farm and the extension of that view of farm-based progress to the level of national political and moral metaphor or model; a deep paternalism central to the construction of the dairymen over and against an idea of the hapless and unscientific (and thus unprofitable) dirt farmer; and constant claims to social welfare and a knowable, even obvious, common good - form, perhaps, some of the earliest stirrings, perhaps, of certain ideals, discourses, practices, and philosophies what would come to be called Progressivism.

The smashing success of the dairy interests' platform stands in stark contrast to what are often seen as the modest legislative and electoral successes of agrarian political movements like the Grange, the Greenback movement and the Populists – related and radical agrarian political phenomena which flourished precisely parallel to the earliest rise of the dairy-state compact and its boldest manifestation, discriminatory margarine regulation. What then, can explain the vast difference between these concurrent agrarian movements? Obviously, the success of anti-margarine campaigns owes much to the limited target of the laws and thus the limited potential political fallout from such a narrow interest group as the margarine manufacturers. But beyond the ease of legislators calculations about such discriminatory regulation in the transitioning political economy of late 19th and early 20th century America, the chief source of the effectiveness of dairy political programs and legislative platforms is the constitutive and constituent cultures, pressures and repetitive practices of specialized dairying itself. That is, the key to understanding how dairymen became the "the most powerfully organized group in American agriculture,"[4] and how they so successfully and early enlisted the beneficial intervention of the state on their behalf, is the specific, daily and repetitive practices necessary for successful specialized dairying. As dairy farmers looked for ways to solve their common problems from the earliest days of widespread commercialization, they quickly found their knowledge lacking, their need for communication and cooperation great, and their potential for market success intimately tied to a great and invisible network of fellow dairy producers whose own varied versions of dairy practice came to bear upon the whole of the industry in ways, say, a wheat farmer would never dream of. Furthermore, the very intimate relationship of the dairyman to the cow, and the demands of that close relationship, provides a kind of constitutive model by which dairymen themselves become a kind of domesticated farmer, improved by progress, which stands in direct, and often purposive, contrast to the farmers that formed the core of the radical agrarian political movements that repeatedly burned over rural America in the late 19th century. Thus, dairymen occupied a fascinating middle ground between the agrarian radical and the urban professional class in the Progressive era. Though their tactics and ideals had more in common with the concurrently rising professional classes, their status as farmers provided for them a language, culture and rhetorical position that proves terribly effective as the frame by which progressive appeals to the common good were made as a means to attack the safe, wholesome, entirely legal and wildly popular food product, margarine.

[3] Gabriel Kolko, *The triumph of conservatism: a re-interpretation of American history, 1900-1916*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1977).
[4] W.T. Mickel, "Margarine Legislation", *Journal of Farm Economics*, Vol. 23 No. 3 (Aug. 1941): 567.

Dairying and the Historiography of Progressivism

Historical thinking about Progressivism is a fertile field of contention, tendentious reaction and profound and useful insights into an immensely transformative period of American history. Following the so-called Gilded Age, a period of American history perhaps less resistant to periodization, the Progressive era is most often seen as running from roughly the last decades of the 19th century or so through the Wilson administration, and sometimes longer. The Progressive period, a term in use as early as 1912 by one account,[5] witnessed the rise of the American national state along with a profusion of political, social and material developments that often seemed to belie easy comparison, but were often undergirded by a common sense that human and government intervention could affect social and material circumstances in positive ways. Thus, a general notion of reform accompanied a sweeping transformation of American government, industry, and society, as formerly largely isolated communities were tied suddenly and directly to distant capitals, markets and political economies over which individuals seemed to have no direct influence.

Robert Wiebe referred to these once isolated polities as "island communities" in his oft-cited work "The Search for Order: 1877-1920," and explained progressivism in the terms of the organizational history of an erosion of the old order of the agrarian and local American life in which "weak communication severely restricted the interaction…and dispersed the power to form opinion and enact pubic policy" and its replacement with a new order of national power centralization and administered, scientifically managed, industrial life; cheered on, constructed and reacted to by a novel middle class empowered and optimistic about its potential for reform.[6] For Wiebe, that novel class is key to any understanding of the era, as "the heart of progressivism was the ambition of the new middle class to fulfill its destiny through bureaucratic means."[7] Wiebe's thesis certainly includes a place for the novel class of dairymen that arose and prospered in precisely the time frame to which he is concerned, even if not explicitly. His conception of this new middle class, "a class only by courtesy of the historian's afterthought," is composed primarily by two groups: professionals and "specialists in business, in labor, and in agriculture awakening both to their distinctiveness and to their ties to similar people in the same occupation."[8] For this new middle class, "rather than a threat the new order promised them release." [9] This is precisely the experience of the dairymen, as will be shown below, and it perfectly paralleled the birth of professional organizations like state bar associations and the American Medical Association in which professional reformers battled the un-standardized chaos of their just coalescing professions with an "earnest desire to remake the world upon their private models."[10] And just like the elite dairymen that would form the tip of the spear of the Dairy-State compact and the brilliantly organized campaign against margarine, elite and progressive professionals in 1900, "were still minorities within their occupations".[11] Wiebe's discussion of the agricultural versions of this middle class only mentions dairying explicitly once, as he rightly describes a novel "hard-headed business approach" to farming emerging the dairy regions, but his analysis of the progressives of this new middle class in agriculture seems to quite perfectly describe that novel, agricultural small–business man, the dairyman. [12]

Famers experienced a more difficult transition from the old order to the new than any other occupational group, Wiebe argues, as "No group within the new middle class relied so heavily upon outside leadership. Dispersed, partial heirs to the Jeffersonian tradition, and beset by conflicting agricultural reforms, they waited in large measure until others showed them the way." While a few outstanding champions of the dairy revolution were indeed "outside leadership" (W.D. Hoard, for

[5] Steven J. Diner, *A Very Different Age: Americans of the Progressive Era*. (NY: Macmillan, 1998), 202.
[6] Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), xiii.
[7] Wiebe, 166.
[8] Wiebe, 112.
[9] Wiebe, 112.
[10] Wiebe, 113.
[11] Wiebe, 112.
[12] Wiebe, 15.

example, was a newspaperman, orator and organizer[13]), dairying seems to have produced a greater share of farmer-leaders than did other specialized agricultural industries. But more to Wiebe's point, the history of the construction of the progressive dairyman is indeed largely a story of constant conflict between a proselytizing, often-successful, elite and the vast majority of small dairy farmers - or worse, non-specialized farmers with cows, not fit to be called dairymen.

The final point Wiebe makes that is central to the history of the dairy-state compact and the progressive dairyman emphasizes the manner in which these new professional and occupational groups stood in relation to the state. In their formative years, the emphasis by these groups was on state autonomy, but that posture quickly changed, in specific ways for specific occupations.[14] Lawyers, doctors and teachers essentially ran their own professional groups and developed their own standards and then had them codified by the state.[15] Not so for business and farming groups, claims Wiebe. These groups "discovered that effective self-regulation required more than an empowering statute. With increasingly elaborate plans for stable prices, coordinated marketing, and reliable, expensive data, they looked as well to a number of bureaus and state agencies that would provide the technical services and specialized needs demanded. In almost every case, these groups depended upon the government for the means of independence from all intruders, including the government itself."[16]

Wiebe's posture toward progressivism is in many ways quite amenable to a view of progressivism as informed by the experience of the dairymen and the American national and interventionist state. His work's broad view emphasizing organizational and underlying economic changes with an understanding of American history that seems to de-emphasize class struggle, shares much with Richard Hofstadter's *The Age of Reform*, an interpretation of progressivism that Wiebe's work in many ways is a response to. For Hofstadter, progressivism is best understood as a revolution of status anxiety produced primarily by the old, pre-industrial conservative elite (the "mugwumps") in response to the erosion of their dominance.[17] Thus, Wiebe shares with Hofstadter a general view of the transition of orders in progressive era, but rejects his view of the old elite as prime mover. In terms of the experience of the dairymen of the era, a decidedly new elite instrumental in the progressive politics, rhetoric and institutions, Wiebe's improvement on Hofstadter was an important and necessary development in the American historiography of progressivism. But both Wiebe's new middle class and Hofstadter's notion of a status anxiety in the old elite, despite their illuminations and innovations, seem, in light of the progressive dairyman, to give short shrift to farmers, and to the power of rural progressives in general as deeply informative and constitutive of the transformation of progressive America.

Though both Wiebe and Hofstadter turned away from an earlier view prominent among historians more baldly in affirmation and confirmation of progressivism's view of itself, [18] the emphasis of New Left historians like Gabriel Kolko represent a turn toward a much more cynical view of the key factors in the movement and period called progressive. Kolko called for progressive impulses and programs to be understood in terms of the rise of what he called "political capitalism," as large business interests dominated what to Kolko was a conservative era of elite corporate domination. Kolko examined the fights over the regulation of railroads and meatpacking, among others, and describes a pattern by which big business successful engages in regulatory capture for their own ends, all the while ensconced in a firmly progressive rhetoric. This is a pattern that can clearly be glimpsed in the history of the dairymen and the dairy-state compact.[19] While Kolko's concentration on business and industry interests capturing and

[13] Loren H. Osman, *W.D. Hoard: a man for his time*. (Ft. Atkinson: Hoard's Dairyman Books, 1985).
[14] Wiebe, 129-30.
[15] Wiebe, 130.
[16] Wiebe, 130.
[17] Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform* (New York: Knopf, 1955), 135-40.
[18] A good example is John D. Hicks *The Populist Revolt: A History of the Farmers' Alliance and the People's Party* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1931).
[19] Keach Johnson, "Iowa Dairying at the Turn of the Century: The New Agriculture and Progressivism." *Agricultural History* 45, no. 2 (April 1971): 95-110.

instigating a beneficial regulation of their companies and markets is a bit different from the direction of those beneficial regulations against a perceived competitor as in the case of progressive dairymen and margarine regulation, dairy farmers engaged in precisely the kinds of activities Kolko describes, especially in urban fluid milk markets, early and often.[20] As such, Kolko's contribution must be included in an understanding of the dairyman and his unique relationship with the state and use of directed regulation as an effective anti-competitive weapon.

Beginning in the 1970's, historians began to question the very possibility of usefully grouping the confluence of factors that produced the vast and varied novel developments in American life in at the turn of the century and after under the single umbrella of progressivism. Peter Filene combats the notion of a useful underlying connection among the disparate and conflicting groups other historians have seen as forming an observable progressive movement. Citing racism, feminism, Nativism, prohibition, immigration and other factors that seriously divided the so-called progressives,[21] Filene declares war on the very existence of a progressive movement that can be useful as an intellectual tool.[22] To speak of a progressive movement with common traits, Filene argues, "provokes confusion" and is counter productive.[23] For Filene, it was time to "tear off the familiar label and, thus liberated from its prejudice, see the history between 1890-1920 for what it was – ambiguous, inconsistent, moved by agents and forces more complex than a progressive movement."[24] While Filene's provocative argument resounded in the discourse of progressivism, its effect was one that changed, perhaps, the nature of the debate, but it did not do away with the widespread notion that there was something particular and shared in the words and deeds of reformers and the human agents of change in the era – something still called progressive by historians today.

A raft of recent scholarship has ignited a lively debate over what to make to the progressive period, and in terms of the history of progressivism and dairy farming, one recent trend has been welcome: a renewed emphasis on the farmer, and the worker as well, as the key force of change in the era. Foremost among this trend are works like Elizabeth Sanders' "*Roots of Reform: Farmers, Workers and the American State 1877-1917*," a work that places farmers back in the progressive spotlight. Sanders takes head on the "capitalist dominance" school of Wiebe, Kolko, Hofstadter and others, arguing with considerable force that "agrarian movements constituted the important political force driving the development of the American national state before WWI."[25] In many ways, Sanders' work is a complex reuniting of progressive state building and the farmer-led, agrarian political movements of the 19th century; a reunion she feels has been denied by previous trends in the historiography. For Sanders, historians have wrongly relegated "agrarian populism to the dustbin of failed crusades."[26] While quite conscious that agrarian-dominated movements like the Populists failed to establish "a rudimentary welfare state", they did "succeed in constructing a rudimentary interventionist state that limited corporate prerogatives."[27] Sanders' key methodological insight is a kind of regional and environmental-industrial analysis that divides the country by their dominant productive practices, emphasizing the agency of what she calls the periphery (the bulk of agrarian, farming America), and details the structural and demographic realties that imbued the agrarian periphery with the power to "establish public control over

[20] Daniel Nelson, *Farm and factory: workers in the Midwest, 1880-1990*. Indiana University Press, 1995, 53-60.
[21] Peter G. Filene, "An Obituary for "The Progressive Movement"." *American Quarterly* 22, no. 1 (Spring 1970): 20-34.
[22] Filene, 20-34.
[23] Filene, 26.
[24] Filene, 34.
[25] Elizabeth Sanders, *Roots of reform: farmers, workers, and the American state, 1877-1917*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 1.
[26] Sanders, 2.
[27] Sanders, 5.

raging capitalism".[28] In light of such claims, Sanders seeks to solve the mysteries associated with a "major anomaly in American political development," that is, how people so opposed to bureaucracy could "nevertheless instigate the creation of a bureaucratic state." It is just this kind of scholarship that demands a place for the history of progressive dairying at the historiography progressivism's table; for dairymen form a kind of vanguard of an agricultural elite that prove incomparably effective at convincing the state to intervene on their behalf. And while Sanders' focus is on farmers amenable to Populism, Greenbackism, and the Grange, radical agrarians quite distinct from the industry-minded, narrow politics of the increasingly middle class dairymen, as the campaign against margarine demonstrates, the role of dairymen in the establishment of the national interventionist state cannot be understood without a view of how the claims and successes of the dairy industry are constructed both over and against the radical agrarians, while simultaneously making effective use of the codes, symbols and languages of rural, farming America.

Historians, perhaps heeding the work of Filene, have tackled the progressive era in wider sweeps of American history often in terms of labor. Of works that give the role of farm groups more emphasis in terms of progressivism and the establishment of the modern interventionist state and thus make room for a wider understanding of the role of dairymen and dairies, *Daniel Nelson's Farm and Factory: Workers in the Midwest 1880-1990* is a standout. While Nelson is primarily concerned with what he sees as a history of the Midwest in the industrial transformation from farm to factory distinct from the patterns in the East,[29] his work illuminates the ways in which farmers were made to aim toward a successful wooing of the government into supportive roles for the industry.[30] In this study, he takes particular notice of the success of dairymen as distinct from the rest of the specialized farmers, and even offers an argument, if briefly, that the disproportionate density of potential for the germination of scientific agricultural values associated with the "country life" movement in Minnesota, Iowa and Wisconsin is an effect of these states disproportionate density of dairy farms.[31] Nelson also does important work linking farmers to urban progressives, especially in Robert La Follette's WI, by exploring the impact of groups like the Farmers Institute movement and dairy organizations' on the course of Midwestern progressive politics.[32]

As Wisconsin played an outsized role in the national progressive movement, both in contributions of progressive politicians and in the birth and instigation of several key aspects of the progressive platform, and continues to dominate the American dairy industry to this day - in spirit if no longer in production – work in the historical debate over progressivism that focuses on the state, such as David Thelen's *The New Citizenship: Origins of Progressivism In Wisconsin, 1885-1900,* in which he dismisses the notion that businessmen were at the heart of progressive reform in Wisconsin. Instead, Thelen finds that a loose confederation of forces from a variety of class and occupational backgrounds make up Wisconsin progressives, forged in the crucible of the depression of the 1890s.[33] Though Thelen's work does chart in some ways the role of farmers in the development of Wisconsin reform, the confluence of progressivism and dairying is not examined.

A few works of history do indeed drive right at the nexus of dairying and progressivism, and foremost among them is Thomas Pegram's *Partisan and Progressives,* a look, like Thelen's, at the development of progressivism in a dairy state, in this case Illinois. But unlike Thelen, Pegram doesn't miss the important place of dairymen as the vanguard of progressive agriculture. In his chapter titled *Agricultural Organization and Progressive Reform,* Pegram takes issue with the way many historians

[28] Sanders, 3.
[29] Nelson, vii.
[30] Nelson, 63-71.
[31] Nelson, 67.
[32] Nelson, 68.
[33] David Paul Thelen, *The new citizenship: origins of progressivism in Wisconsin, 1885-1900*. (St. Louis: University of Missouri Press, 1972), 307.

have "relished" what they saw as "the neatness of the farmer's conversion from anachronistically whiskered hayseeds hanging their battered hopes on an outdated 'producer mentality' and the wreck of third-party politics into sharp-eyed traders committed to (a) non-partisan market orientation."[34] Though Pegram looks only the disproportionately urban, middleman dominated, Illinois dairy history, his insights are invaluable to a complete account of the role of dairy farmers and progressive policies. His emphasis, though brief, is on the way in which dairying succeeds early in the drive to enlist the state in beneficial relationships with private industry, and it is here we finally begin to see a clear, if short, discussion that gives to dairymen their proper place. Nelson's work is accompanied in its great contribution to the study of dairying and its impact on progressivism by Keach Johnson in what may be the sole, direct and focused discussion of dairy farmers and progressivism in the historiography. Like Nelson, Johnson's focus is on a single dairy state, but *Iowa Dairying At The Turn Of The Century: The New Agriculture and Progressivism* points the way for a clearer understanding this novel class of scientifically-minded dairy farmers and their relationship to progressive reform movements and the rise of the dairy-state compact in Iowa. Johnson, surveying the history of the specialization and commercialization of Iowa dairying, demonstrates the manner in which the demands of modern dairying lend themselves to what Johnson, following Kolko, sees as the dominant theme of the progressive era: "the expansion of the role of government to meet the requirements of modern industrial society."[35] But, as Johnson argues, the position of the dairy progressive is "a good example of the difficulties involved in interpreting the progressive era," for as dairymen "can hardly be called crusaders for social justice," their reliance on the rhetoric of the public good is for Johnson not always merely rhetoric.[36] Thus, of Iowa's progressive dairymen, Johnson declares: "Their motives were selfish, but their selfishness was enlightened."[37] Johnson here is getting at the unique position of dairymen in the progressive era. His insistence that dairy farmers not be denied their "progressive credentials" is not merely an afterthought to his main task, providing detailed evidence of their activities successfully lobbying the state for industry-specific legislation and regulation, but seems to point to what interests Johnson about the twin rise of commercial dairymen and progressivism.[38]

Dairy farmers, then, constructed a position in the progressive era that can be understood as existing in some sense between the two poles of the bureaucratic, urban business class and rural, agrarian farming masses, the effect of which is a complex act of synthesis that brilliantly succeeds at making the most of the potential utilities of both. In this way, the dairyman perhaps has something to add to the long and fruitful historical discourse concerning progressivism, as rising tide of recent scholarship moves to put the farmer back in the spotlight and more closely establish a relationship between radical agrarian political movements like the Greenbackers and the Populists and their progressive predecessors. Furthermore, a look at progressive dairymen may offer an insight, however humble, into a vision of progressivism that might provide a map to a kind of synthesis of the organizational, god's-eye-view of Wiebe and the critique of Kolko - both foreground the businessman, as does Hofstadter, as the key agent - with recent, and no less authoritative, work that demands a greater emphasis on farmers by Elizabeth Sanders.

This study is an attempt to understand dairy farmers as agricultural progressives – as domesticated farmers, improved by the daily demands of the particular routines and effects of the process of dairying itself in way that disposes them to an affinity to effective organization and political sophistication that proved remarkably adept at enlisting the intervention of the state on its behalf. The first section examines the specialization and commercialization of dairy farmers, the rise of male dairy farmers and the organizational and structural pressures of the industry. Second, a look at the building of the dairy-

[34] Nelson, 25.
[35] Keach Johnson, "Iowa Dairying at the Turn of the Century: The New Agriculture and Progressivism." *Agricultural History* 45, no. 2 (April 1971): 110.
[36] Johnson, 109.
[37] Johnson, 110.
[38] Johnson, 109.

state compact as seen through the solving of a number rather pressing problems for the dairy industry reveals the deep conflicts between the progressive dairy elite and the mass of small dairy farmers, as the fitful construction of the American "dairyman" must be understood as both a contested revolution in knowledge, organization and production *and* at the same time a process by which farmers were increasingly themselves domesticated and pulled from the ranks of the radical, agrarian farming masses into a new, agricultural middle class. And lastly, the most important of those pressing problems to elite dairymen, the threat of margarine, is examined as the greatest testament to the power and genesis of the intimate relationship between dairying and the state.

Household Butter Production and Gendered Farm Work

In 1869, just as Frenchman Hippolyte Mege-Mourie's development of what he called oleomargarine, an emulsion of beef fat, maragaric acid and other ingredients intended as a substitute for butter, was being heralded across Europe, in America, a successful novelist and her sister were grimacing in revulsion at the state of butter. In *American Woman's Home*, a successful handbook for 19th century women, Harriet Beecher Stowe, author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and her sister Catherine Beecher repeatedly bemoan the domestic devastation born of "that unpardonable enormity, strong butter!"[39] Their handbook is dominated by cooking advice and commentary, and these sections are themselves dominated by a hefty portion of acrimony toward the state of American butter. The Beecher sisters report finding only one firkin, a traditional butter container, in twenty worth buying; finding the rest rancid, or 'strong', beyond palatability. As butter can be found in nearly every food item on an American table, as the Beecher sisters report, no one and no dish is safe from the "hobgoblin bewitchment of cream into foul and loathsome poisons".[40]

> "A matter of despair as regards bad butter is, that at the table where it is used it stands as sentinel at the door to bar your way to every other kind of food. You turn from your dreadful half-slice of bread, which fills your mouth with bitterness, to your beef-steak, which proves virulent with the same poison; you think to take refuge in vegetable diet, and find the butter in the string-beans, and polluting the innocence of the early peas; it is in the corn, in the succotash, in the squash; the beets swim in it, the onions have it poured over them. You are ready to howl in despair…"[41]

Eloquent and spirited rancor is directed at American butter supplies in numerous occasions throughout the popular homemaking manual; all accompanied by the notion, somehow, that it needn't be this way, as "the process of making good butter is a simple one."[42] Their concerns were shared by Mark Miller, the first editor of *Wisconsin Farmer,* who condemned all butter made in Wisconsin around 1850 as "either sour, or bitter, or rancid, or in some respect offensive," and also emphasized the "simple" solution to the problem.[43]

The Beecher sisters and the *Wisconsin Farmer* are merely two eloquent voices in a generally loud chorus of revulsion at bad butter. The problem was systemic and structural: in the post-war years as in the antebellum period, dairying was a matter of household production. As the daily milking accrued and the cream separated, usually by gravity, butter was made as the quantities of cream merited, and then stored in firkins until enough of the surplus was gathered to sell to a local retail agent. Once bought off households, the storeowner or peddler combined the various products into a large, bulk container for sale

[39] Catharine Beecher, & Harriet Stowe, *American Woman's Home*, (Baltimore: Applewood Books, 2008), 167.
[40] Beecher, 178.
[41] United States. Bureau of Animal Industry, *Annual report of the Bureau of Animal Industry for the year 1899.* (Washington: G.P.O., 1900), 245.
[42] Beecher, *168.*
[43] *Wisconsin Farmer*, 1, 1854, 12.

– mixing the freshest and finest sweet cream butters of the most conscientious dairymaids with the rancid, dirty and aged butters of the least of the dairy-skilled, or the furthest afield. Thus, by the time the seller could furnish women like the Beechers with butter in these days of wooden firkins and hand-churns, it almost universally left much to be desired.

Dairy work before the mid to late 19th century was predominantly the household purview of farm wives and daughters; and it was for many farmers a marginal, household task not worthy of the focus of the cultivator, whose rightful place was in the fields. For two centuries, as one agricultural historian describes, "the dairy in North America remained an adjunct of the household," it was "woman's work, beneath the dignity of the yeoman."[44] The organization of state and county agricultural fairs in the antebellum period, and after, reveals this reality well: at the Wisconsin state fairs of 1858 and 1859, dairy goods were shown in the "Dairy and Household Department" alongside cakes, wines and other feminine wares.[45] The *Wisconsin Farmer,* and other agricultural periodicals of the period in a similar manner, included dairy news in its "Domestic Economy" section alongside recipes and cooking tips.[46] Furthermore, most of the farm newspapers had female dairy correspondents – most of them farmer's wives.[47]

In the cheese-making centers of the East, where dairy specialization and then commercialization took hold earliest, the re-gendering of dairy work was accompanied by the oft-repeated argument that posed the move from household cheese-making to a factory system as an end to an undue exploitation of women.[48] In the decades before the civil war the *Genesee Farmer* featured a running debate over what it often called the "milking question", in which the blurring of the gendered nature of dairy work is in evidence: farm girls wrote in to express the unfairness of the gendered household division of labor; others like one "A.M." writing in 1857, thought "perhaps the better way lies between the two extremes. Whoever in the family has most leisure ought to do the milking."[49] Another example of this common argument attending the de-feminization and rise of commercial dairying is offered by John Wesley Hoyt, an editor of the Wisconsin State Agricultural Society's *Transactions:* "The dairy business as practiced on the farm is an exceedingly laborious and trying one upon the female of the household; and on this account, also, the farmers of the West are to be congratulated on the highly satisfactory manner in which, as individuals, it is possible for them to escape from its further prosecution."[50]

Such debates are evidence of an early de-feminization of dairy work. Historians like Sally McMurray have shown that cheese making was among the first farm work to be de-feminized as early cheese factories appeared in the oldest concentrations of dairy specialization in the East, like the New York dairy regions of Herkimer and Orange counties.[51] In general, cheese making was increasingly removed from the household and taken to the factory - where it was taken up by almost exclusively by men. As McMurray argues, this same trend later can be seen in the de-feminization and commercialization of butter production followed by farm work in general and the rise of a normative rural female domesticity.[52] Thus, as male dairy farmers emerge as the key players in the campaigns against margarine, the necessary de-feminization of dairy work illustrates, at least in terms of gendered work, the essential novelty of the male, specialized dairy farmer as cultivator - as well as agitator and organizer. What's more, dairy work as gendered female and the lacking, pre-commercial, pre-scientific nature of

[44] Lampard, Eric. *The Rise of the Dairy Industry in Wisconsin: A Study in Agricultural Change 1829-1920*, (Madison: State Historical Society, 1963), 57.
[45] Lampard, 372.
[46] Lampard, 372.
[47] Lampard, 81.
[48] Sally Ann McMurray, *Transforming Rural Life: Dairying Families and Agricultural Change* 1820-1885 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 65.
[49] *Genesee Farmer,* 18 (July 1857), 276.
[50] Lampard, 81.
[51] McMurray, 145.
[52] McMurray, 191-193.

traded butter of the era are conflated in the common, progressive construction of a sense of dairy masculinity. Such conflations and construction can be seen in the brief dairy history of Henry Alvord, chief of the Dairy Division of the Bureau of Animal Industry, contributed to the BAI annual report of 1899. For Alvord, the quality of butter of the era is attributable to the fact that such things were "in the hands of women of the household, and the methods and utensils were crude."[53] As well, two photographs that accompany Alvord's history and optimistic look ahead illustrate his intention with precision: in Fig. #1, with the caption "Butter Making – The Old Way", an aged woman in a large dress sits in a rustic room, she churns butter with one small hand – spilling from the churn as she does; at her feet, and around her, an unorganized group of small pails and firkins sit as the woman does: small and quaint; in Fig. #2, with the caption "Butter Making – The New Way", a tall, robust man stands proudly next to a large mechanized butter churner; nothing leaks, and the large vessels in his work are seen to stand in an organized and cleanly manner about the machine.[54] These images speak directly to the common notions of a kind of dairy masculinity constructed by these novel, specialized producers as they took up dairying as the central focus of their farms. While the female dairy producer would largely disappear on American farms as dairy production was increasingly commercialized, in a closely related phenomena to that of the particular ideological content of anti-margarine campaigns, she would reappear quite often in the logos, and on the packaging of butter and other dairy products.

The Diversification and Specialization of American Agriculture

The earliest examples of specialized American dairy farmers most often came to dairying only after often rocky divorces from the first love of U.S. agriculture, wheat farming. Even as dairy farmers, particularly cheese makers, in the East first demonstrated the potential success and stability of a specialized dairy farm to their cohort in the years before the civil war, the ranks of committed dairymen would alternately swell and thin for decades as the wheat market declined, or rebounded -or as the dairy market was, often in direct relation to those swelling and thinning ranks, glutted with supply, or demanding more.[55] Soil depletion loomed large in this transformation, but so did the ever present competition of Western wheat, sown on fresh soils and always more productive than the established, and increasingly depleted, areas of earliest agricultural settlement. For those farmers, then, that underwent specialization or even feinted towards it, dairying was quite often the obvious and rational solution to numerous looming problems - and they said so, in a strikingly similar and confident manner. The gradual emergence of specialized dairy farmers moved roughly from East to West over the 19th century, beginning in the oldest concentrations of commercial cheese makers, such as Herkimer and Orange County, NY and diffusing across the continent into the mid-west soon after - spread in no small part by the constant reports of Eastern dairy successes in the Agricultural press of the Old Northwest.

By 1841, a Cayuga County farmer worried from Western New York that "we obtain now, rarely more than 20 bushels per acre", affixing blame for the low yields on "the manner of civilization… taxing the land beyond its powers of production."[56] By 1845 the average wheat yield in Eastern New York was less than ten bushels an acre; comparable reductions hit surrounding regions as well, and a move to convertible husbandry, as a restorative measure for the soil as much as for new economic opportunities, was afoot since at least the 1830's.[57] But the move to focused dairy farming had attracted a number of cultivators impressed by both its profitability as well as its restorative power in terms of soils and the application of manure. In general, the main product of these early, specialized dairy farms was cheese;

[53] United States. Bureau of Animal Industry, *Annual report of the Bureau of Animal Industry for the year 1899* (Washington: G.P.O., 1900), 245.
[54] United States. Bureau of Animal Industry, *Annual report of the Bureau of Animal Industry for the year 1899* (Washington: G.P.O., 1900),. 244.
[55] Lampard, 86.
[56] New York State Agriculture Society, *Transactions*, (New York: NYSAS, 1841), 136.
[57] Lampard, 62.

though some concentrated dairy regions near urban areas participated in increasing fluid milk and butter sales, these farms most often were not of that rare variety of focused dairy farmers, at least not yet.

The first editor of *Wisconsin Farmer,* Mark Miller, devoted much ink to monitoring the successes of Eastern dairy farmers and the difficulties of Eastern wheat growers beginning about 1850: "In New York, some sections are known as dairy counties, and…farmers in those parts, net more money for the year's labor than in the best wheat growing counties. Butter is always a cash article, and commands a more remunerating price than wheat or pork."[58] It was not just printed examples of the success of New York dairying pioneers that helped catalyze the moving of the center of the dairy universe from the East to the mid-West, many New York dairy farmers departed themselves for places like Wisconsin for cheap lands and fresh starts. The first Wisconsin State Fair, held at Janesville in October 1851, offered "a handsome display of Cheese and Butter, small in quantity but excellent in quality;" along with a few farmers wives and daughters, seven dairymen had also entered the competition.[59] It is telling that both the winners of the cheese and butter premiums at the fair were former New Yorkers of the old dairy regions who had recently moved to Wisconsin to commence dairying.[60] Declines in wheat yields, market instability and chinch bugs began to hit Wisconsin counties in numbers in the 1850's, precipitating two big crises that sent farmers into dairying – and out again as conditions improved. In the wake of this instability a committed group of specialized dairy farmers, cheer-led by key editors of publications like Mark Miller at the *Wisconsin Farmer*, utilized an economy of skill and a rudimentary effort at standardization that inspired, and convinced through evidence and reason, thousands of likeminded farmers. The road to dairy specialization was not an easy one, and as supply and demand fluctuations in both the wheat and cheese markets wracked American farmers in the years after the civil war, those left standing, and proselytizing, were among an elite group of farmers inclined to the kinds of practices that would eventually be referred to as scientific agriculture and disposed to capitalize quickly on economies of scale and the increasing levels of integration so required.

Farm, Factory and the Midwest Dairy Revolution

One Wisconsin farmer, himself a recent transplant from New York, reached Kenosha in 1857: "not expecting to make cheese or do any dairying. I tried raising grain here for two years, and finding that I should lose what little I had if I kept on, I made up my mind that I had got to leave the country or do something else, and then I thought I would undertake to make cheese."[61] This early adopter of dairy specialization is illustrative of the small wave of dairy specialization that swept over the settled mid-west in the decade before the civil war, especially in Wisconsin, Illinois and Iowa. As the war years, and the remainder of the 1860's as well, saw a rebound in wheat prices, many neophyte dairymen returned to grain. In 1868, John Wesley Hoyt, Sheboygan County dairyman and editor of the Wisconsin State Agricultural Society's *Transactions,* noted that "dairies for the manufacture of butter and cheese are doubtless fewer, relatively, than in 1860." Total production though, as Hoyt noted, had continually increased as per "the establishment of, in various sections of the state, of cheese factories managed by private firms, joint-stock companies and mutual benefit associations."[62] While butter was made on just about every Wisconsin farm that kept cows (mostly for household consumption and limited local market sales), the earliest focused specialization and commercialization of dairying, as in the East, was fostered by farms and factories concentrating on cheese production.

The suitability of cheese production for early commercial dairy farmers, due to its ease in shipping and its relative indestructibility compared to butter and milk, had profound effects on the nature of dairying and dairymen. First, success in cheese production required at level of skill unknown to the vast majority of farmers. In the 1850's and 60's, some skilled cheese makers worked a cheese-season

[58] *Wisconsin Farmer*, 1, 1854, 13.
[59] Lampard, 77.
[60] Lampard, 77.
[61] Lampard, 78.
[62] Lampard, 91.

circuit: moving from factory, to factory, to farm, taking a group of farmers' milk (or curds) through the process of making a quality product that could be expected to find a market.[63] Thus, unlike wheat farming, to make the turn to commercial, specialized dairying required a rare concern for particular set of skills - of which, values like predictability and precision were emphasized. In this way, early commercial dairying took on an economy of skill in which farmers necessarily venerated the skilled and the learned, and a necessary culture of progress and improvement pervaded dairy communities. Second, dairy farming required a sizeable capital investment often far beyond the requirements of wheat or other farming. Even in areas with early cheese factories and co-operative use of expensive facilities and equipment, the average dirt farmer was unable to just jump right into keeping "milch cows." Third, would be dairymen had to overcome a general sentiment that the local grasses and climate of the Old Northwest was just not suited for dairying. While a chorus of early dairy boosters in the region ridiculed the notion of a "dairy belt" - arguing that with the right care dairying could be successfully carried out just about anywhere in the country – their insistent harping on this argument is itself evidence of the uphill climb the idea of dairying in the Old Northwest faced among most farmers.[64] Finally, the specialization into dairying required either access to existing dairy markets or the pioneering of new ones. As such, dairy farmers were forced to be marketers in ways their wheat-growing neighbors would never dream. This market necessity demanded dairy farmers get off the farm in search of market knowledge, buyers, suppliers and transportation options. All of these factors combined to, in many ways, limit the variety of farmer available to specialize - especially in the early days of commercialization. These structural impositions would have some lasting effects on the culture and spirit of dairying for decades.

Such constraints, though, were lessened as cheese factories and creameries shifted the focus of dairy production from the individual farm to the factory. As more and more of these centralized locations of dairy production were constructed, farmers found themselves in a better position to transition to dairy specialization. And they did transition, in greater numbers following the first few factories established in the late 1860's. An estimate of the state of Wisconsin dairy by J.W. Hoyt, made at the beginning of the decade, claimed a total butter production of 10,923,826 pounds, valued at $1,198,404 and only 1,176,816 lbs of cheese, with an estimated value of $112,139. [65] Hoyt's survey, taken before the advent of the factory system in the state, would soon need revision. Chester Hazen's cheese factory, established in Ladoga, WI, in the summer of 1864 is usually credited with being Wisconsin's first[66]; and as a few pioneering dairymen like Hazen demonstrated dairy's potential, thousands of newly specialized farmers would follow in their wake in the decade to come – making the mid-west the production leader of American dairying by 1880, and Wisconsin the center of the dairy universe by the start of the 20th century.

The 1870's would prove pivotal for the rise of dairying in Wisconsin, as farmers became dairymen at staggering rates. At the start of the decade, New York boasted 818 of the country's 1,313 cheese factories.[67] That same year, as reported by the Ninth Census of the United States, Wisconsin had just 5 factories representing $126,740 in capital investment, with a labor force of 177 - thirty of which were women.[68] From the humble beginnings of these five factories, a dairy revolution would sweep Wisconsin, as well as Northern Illinois and Iowa, in just ten years. Cows illustrate the revolution well: by 1880, the number of milk cows in Wisconsin had risen to 478,374 –a 55% increase from the previous decade.[69] The total cheese product also rose considerably, from less than 400,000 lbs. in 1870 to 19,535,324 lbs. by the end of the decade. As evidence of the success of the cheese factory system, only

[63] Lampard, 92.
[64] Lampard, 82.
[65] Lampard, 83.
[66] Lampard, 95.
[67] Lampard, 95.
[68] Lampard, 96.
[69] Lampard, 109.

2,281,411 lbs. of that total cheese product was farm-made. Wisconsin had also come to boast the nation's third largest concentration of cheese and butter factories.[70]

The mid-west revolution of the creamery, the butter factory, was to lag a bit behind the cheese explosion in Wisconsin, but was hardly less spectacular. The Illinois establishment of the Elgin Board of Trade, or "Butter Board" in 1872, and the quick rise of what was sold as "Western Creamery Butter" to the most highly priced butter bought in the country – unprecedented for anything other than and Eastern butter - both spurred on further creamery growth in Illinois and elsewhere and is evidence of a robust butter factory system south of the Wisconsin border.[71] Wisconsin would soon catch up. Again, the Ninth Census reported no creameries it the state in 1870, and even by 1881, the *Jefferson County Union* – owned and edited by a man who would become the nation's single greatest proselytizer of progressive dairy, William Dempster Hoard – reported no more than 40.[72] In just eleven years time that number would rise to 265.[73] Creamery butter production followed the same trajectory: from less than 500,000 lbs in 1879 to more than 14,000,000 lbs. in 1889. By one estimate, that is an increase of 2,700 percent.[74] The excellent examples of farmers like Hiram Smith and Chester Hazen doubtless sped the explosive Wisconsin transition to dairying, but other another factor helped as well: the lumbering of Wisconsin cleared vast tracts of land that gave themselves over to dairying quite well (lumber camps had also provided one of the few constant demands for dairy products outside the urban centers throughout Wisconsin history, and thus had sustained their own pockets of viable specialization). In fact, as the New Yorker dairymen flights to Wisconsin attest, Wisconsin had a number of economic advantages that perhaps proved decisive in the movement of the center of the dairy universe. Perhaps most persuasively to the New York farmers, land was quite a bit cheaper. Buying cows proved some 25% cheaper in the Old Northwest, as did farm labor, which received wages some 60% higher in New York.[75] But despite these structural advantages, the role of the concentration of knowledge, skill and organizational capabilities must be counted as central to Wisconsin's meteoric rise to international dairy prominence. The rise of Sheboygan County, Wisconsin in the late 1870's to the top dairy-producing county in the state– producing more than double its closest rival by 1885 – can be seen as a microcosm of Wisconsin's own dairy revolution. As Wisconsin dairy historian Eric Lampard argues, Sheboygan's success was most attributable to two factors: first, the establishment of the Sheboygan Falls Dairy Board of Trade, modeled on the Elgin board, in 1872 offered superior marketing facilities to producers, and second, and the rare concentration of dairy leadership and skill. Sheboygan County was the home of a number of dairymen instrumental in the establishment of the Wisconsin Dairymen's Association, the University of Wisconsin College of Agriculture and other key institutions in the dairy-state alliance that would come to epitomize both Wisconsin progressivism and the national phenomenon of margarine regulation. It is this second factor that led to the establishment of the first, and thus must be emphasized. It is in this way, that Sheboygan County, and men like Hiram Smith, come to represent the whole of dairying Wisconsin: a dynamic dairy economy undergirded by a superior infrastructure of scientific agricultural knowledge sponsored by the state, capable of methodical experimentation and research that produced results and a vocal leadership with a knack for publicity and organization. It was a routine – constituted, as we have seen, by structural realities of dairy farming - that would serve dairymen well in the solution and amelioration of a number of dairy's most pressing problems.

---

[70] Lampard, 109.
[71] Thomas R. Pegram, "Public Health and Progressive Dairying in Illinois." *Agricultural History* (Winter 1991), 42.

[72] Lampard, 110.
[73] *Sheboygan County News*, February 17th, 1891.
[74] Lampard, 116.
[75] Lampard, 96.

The Demands of Dairying: The Growth of the Dairy-State Compact

Despite dairy specialization having swept great swaths of Midwestern following its genesis in the East, one of the great leaders of this transformation, W.D. Hoard surveyed the dairy industry with disdain in 1886. Looking out over the young industry just a year after the founding of his specialized dairy journal, *Hoard's Dairymen*, from what would soon to be the center of the dairy world, Ft. Atkinson, Wisconsin, Hoard was discouraged, to say the least. He moaned that farmers "…really have no clear understanding of a dairy cow – of what she is, how she is bred or what she is for. They have lived with cows all of their lives, only to know less about them than they do about dogs, for not one but knows better than to hunt prairie chickens with a bull dog. Yet they will persistently drive along, year after year, trying to make money at dairying with beef animals."[76]

Hoard's dairy journal would become the single most important periodical in the history of dairying, and Hoard himself would prove one the nation's most successful proselytizers of the scientific dairying revolution and even get himself elected Governor of Wisconsin. Hoard's contempt, on display here, for the masses of unwashed dairy farmers and their antiquated notions, processes and products was matched only by his optimistic zeal for the gospel of progressive dairying. For Hoard, that gospel was not just a tool for the improvement of farm profits, soil fertility and dairy product quality, but a recipe for the creation of the dairyman, an improved American farmer whose personal and commercial progress meant an unmistakable step forward for the nation as a whole. But thousands of farmers disagreed, some with as much, or more contempt and righteousness as Hoard, and loudly resisted each new development in the scientific dairying revolution.

The transformation of the American dairy in the late 19th century precisely mirrors the transformation of dairymen: from general utility animals to specialized, studied and increasingly efficient producers. As dairymen transformed their industry, no concern was greater than the fight over breeds and the quest to prove the productive capacity of milk cows. Some of the earliest dairy journals are devoted to specialized breeds and their breeders as well as dairymen; including Hoard's constant rival Dennis Jenkins' *Jersey Bulletin*, founded in 1877 in Indianapolis.[77] Jenkins and Hoard disagreed on nearly everything, but not in regard to the need for specialized milk breeds. Both dairy editors directed much scorn at the idea of the general use cow, or "dual-use" – a cow maximized for milk and beef, and both continually chafed at what they saw as the failure of too many to heed their call.[78] Jenkins, in 1885, declared "there seems to be no idea so hard to eradicate from the mind of farmers and dairymen as the 'general purpose' idea."[79] It took decades of campaigning to convince dairymen to abandon the general-purpose cow, though many resented the entire proposition. One dairyman, writing to a breed journal in 1889, complained that "it is a favorite theme with the majority of our writers to decant on the merits of specialty farming, and the general-purpose farmer who grows his grain, makes some butter and finishes off a few steers or hogs each year, is each week rapped over the head unmercifully by somebody."[80] Hoard and Jenkins would be vindicated, as breed competitions, often at state and county fairs sponsored by farmers clubs or Agricultural schools, convinced more and more farmers of the profit potential of a Holstein, or of the high fat content of the Jersey's milk.[81] For elite dairymen advocating the necessity of scientific agricultural practices, no fight it seemed garnered more passion or patience than the quest to eradicate the general use cow. For men like Hoard and Jenkins, it was the cow that made the man into a dairyman.[82]

---

[76] John T. Schlebecker and Andrew W. Hopkins, *A history of dairy journalism in the United States, 1810-1950*. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1957), 82.
[77] Schlebecker and Hopkins, 274-6.
[78] Schlebecker and Hopkins, 62.
[79] Schlebecker and Hopkins, 62.
[80] Schlebecker and Hopkins, 82.
[81] Lampard, 169.
[82] Schlebecker and Hopkins, 66-7.

The push for specialized breeds, as such, demanded a revolution in testing, as dairymen needed a standardized and reliable system to settle their quarrels. The single greatest advancement in the history of dairy testing came as University of Wisconsin dairy scientist Stephan Babcock perfected his acid test for the butterfat content of milk, but as usual what Hoard and his cohort of progressive dairymen heralded, small farmers shunned.[83] Jenkins too, a butter man at heart who firmly believed in the churn as the only true test of a cow butterfat potential, resisted openly – even attacking Babcock himself. [84] A writer to the American Dairymen expressed a deep skepticism: "If these advocates of the oil test (Babcock test) and the churn do not stop proving to the outside world how incredibly unreliable their tests are…dairymen will throw up both of them in disgust. Either one of these machines would send a man to jail…"[85] As more and more standardization came to dairy testing, and specialized breeds predominated, the question of feeds and productivity intensified.

One of the earliest concerns of commercial dairymen had always been the extension of the milking season. By the turn of the century, the average dairy cow was in milk just four to six months of the year – a fact that played havoc on prices and market stability. Hoard pointed out as well that a short milk season kept farmers out of the creamery system, as their production made it not worth the effort.[86] The solution that emerged beginning in the late 1870's with the introduction of a few key published studies was ensilage, the proper storage of cut feed for winter feeding in specially made structures. As usual, dairy farmers were skeptical, and even some scientifically minded dairymen found the system foreign and were suspicious.

Dean Henry of the College of Agriculture, for one, was skeptical. Though in 1881, he organized an experiment in ensilage at public expense on the Agricultural College's dairy farm in Madison. With a four thousand dollar appropriation from the state legislature, Henry proceeded to dig a below ground silo with, what turned out to be too-porous walls, 27 x 12 x 15 feet deep. When winter came, the results were abysmal: a good portion of the cows refused to eat the cut feed, and Henry was put off of the ensilage idea for a few more years. Midwest farmers would not rapidly take to the silo until the Farmers' Institutes took up the campaign with gusto around 1885 [87] Hoard, too, never wavered in his constant support, and was still talking up the silo as late as 1915.[88] The benefits to ensilage became obvious to farmers, and despite early misgivings, they eventually took to the silo. A silo census carried out by the Wisconsin Experiment Station in 1904 found 716 silos in the state, but by the first annual state census in 1915 that number had reached 55,992.[89]

Perhaps no struggle between the forces of scientific agricultural elites like Hoard and the mass of dairy farmers was more heated than that of the issue of disease, the battle over bovine tuberculosis in particular. The same year Babcock demonstrated his celebrated fat-test, 1890, the discovery of the tubercle bacillus by a German bacteriologist precipitated the development of a lymph test that allowed dairymen to easily test their cattle for the disease for the first time.[90] While tuberculosis affected both cattle and humans, it was not proven until the twentieth century that bovine tuberculosis could be passed on to humans, and farmers clung to a belief that it in fact could not in the face of new proof of the wide extent of bovine tuberculosis in American dairy herds. In Wisconsin, Harry L. Russell, an employee of the state experiment station, took the new lymph test to the station's herd in a widely reported public spectacle. Russell recounts the scene: "Hundreds of farmers flocked to Madison to see the results. As the sleek, well-fed animals were led before the crowd, murmurs of disapproval were loudly voiced to see

[83] Lampard, 180.
[84] Schlebecker and Hopkins, 87.
[85] Schlebecker and Hopkins, 86.
[86] Lampard, 154.
[87] Lampard, 158.
[88] *Hoard's Dairyman*, June 11, 1915, 4.
[89] Lampard, 162.
[90] Lampard, 188.

such fine specimens of the different dairy breeds sacrificed. But the autopsies told another story…"[91] The key to getting farmers to eradicate the disease, though, would be compensation for their slaughtered, diseased animals, and while states like Wisconsin offered early compensation programs, as late as 1917 Hoard was claiming the disease was spreading in the state.[92] Soon after, large federal subsidies fed a nationally organized effort with dairymen and their organizations in the lead. By 1940, the disease was effectively wiped out, and the dairymen declared victory. As Hoard had spent the majority of the last years of his life engaged in an active fight for eradication, the victory was in no small part his.

Throughout the revolution to commercial, scientific dairying, the program of organized dairymen like Hoard increasingly allied with state institutions to accomplish goals – boasting success rate of some accomplishment. This is particularly of note, for as at every step of the dairy revolution, small farmers continually resisted the intrusion of paternalistic dairy editors like Hoard and the officials of the state experiment stations, Agricultural colleges and State Departments of Agriculture.[93] In fact, the earliest works of dairy journalism before and after the civil war often disparaged "book-farming" and saved a special brand of hatred for agricultural schools and farm professors.[94] The feelings were often mutual, and Hoard could express this sentiment with more pith than most: "One reason there is so much truth in the oft reiterated remark – 'Farming don't pay' – is that there is not another business on the face of the earth that, in proportion to the numbers engaged in it, supports so many incompetents."[95]

Margarine as Competitor, Imitator, and Fraud

The introduction of a novel, spreadable fat to the markets of American cities in the late 19th century provoked a reaction among dairy interests which precipitated the earliest, and one of the most sweeping and durable regimes of state and federal intervention in the form of regulation, taxation and licensure ever directed at a single, legally-produced domestic product. Dairy interests, fearful of the low-cost competitive advantage of oleo-margarine, and later margarine, marshaled a legislative alliance which succeeded in stigmatizing, suppressing and regulating the manufacture of the edible fat for over a century in some states, a phenomenon nowhere more powerful than in Wisconsin. While the dairy interests and their powerful political allies continually couched their arguments in "progressive" appeals to the national and social welfare and consumer protection, their actions clearly represent a continuation of the exact kinds of scientific moralism and dairy-state alliances that served organized dairymen and their state allies so well in the facing of the threat of Bovine Tuberculosis, the problem of ensilage and the question of breeds and feeds. As margarine gained a foothold in food markets across America, dairymen moved to act in a manner that had served their interests well before, and seemed likely to again, the enlistment of government intervention and protection.

The invention was met with fanfare in France, and elicited strong market reactions upon introduction to European markets.[96] This was not to be margarine's experience in the New World. The first American purchase of Mege-Mourie's margarine-manufacturing patent occurred in 1875, with large-scale production beginning first in New York and then diffusing west quickly enough that Wisconsin passed its first oleomargarine law by 1881.[97] This law mirrored a handful of laws already on the books in Maryland (1877) and New York (1876) as its sole provisions dictated that tallow compounds in imitation of butter must be marked "oleomargarine," and lard compounds, "butterine." These focused label-laws represent the first phase in what would be the long and complex history of margarine laws in the U.S. and

[91] Lampard, 188.
[92] *Hoard's Dairyman*, Apr. 13, 1917, 6.
[93] Marcus, Alan I. "The Ivory Silo: Farmer-Agricultural College Tensions in the 1870s and 1880s." *Agricultural History* 60, no. 2 (Spring 1986): 22-36.
[94] Schlebecker and Hopkins, 30.
[95] *Hoard's Dairyman*, Jan. 4, 1889, 3.
[96] Ruth Dupre. "'If It's Yellow, It Must be Butter': Margarine Regulation in North America Since 1886". *The Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 59, No. 2 (Jun., 1999), 353.
[97] Siert F. Riepma, *The story of margarine*. (Washington D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1970), 110.

are of significance in their singular focus and for their short tenure as the sole regulatory weapon of dairy interest-directed government intervention. An 1881 article printed in the *Wisconsin State Journal* following passage of the label-law explained, perhaps, the unsatisfied feeling among some dairymen about the prospects of further legal and legislative action: "It is perhaps as far as the law can go to compel manufacturers to label these compounds with names which shall be descriptive of their compositions."[98] This sentiment would prove dramatically shortsighted almost immediately.

As the margarine market grew the dairymen and their allies marshaled considerable state intervention to combat the manufacture and sale of margarine, crafting a raft of regulatory and prohibitory measures which would go so far as to effectively cease production in states like Wisconsin for decades. Four years after the passage of the 1881 label law, an outright legislative prohibition was enacted in Wisconsin, again mirroring a law passed in New York the same year. Though the United States Supreme Court ruled in a Pennsylvania case just a year later, *People v. Marx* (1885), that the New York law unconstitutionally suppressed a legal product "merely for the protection of dairy interests," it would serve only as a temporary impasse as a nearly identical law was held up by the same court the following year.[99]

By some accounts, the U.S. dairy industry had much to fear. One unusually plainspoken former president of the Wisconsin Dairy Association, Hiram Smith, declared in 1881 "oleomargarine is giving better satisfaction than most dairy butter as now made."[100] Smith predicted that unless butter improved in quality, margarine would drive it off the market in the large cities.[101] A traveler in New York in the same year reported true a slightly more focused version of Smith's prediction: "the markets in this city are full of oleomargarine ... it has driven rancid butter from the market."[102] Rancid, revived, repackaged and generally repulsive butter had been a problem common nationwide in the pre-refrigeration, household-based production era of oleomargarine's introduction, especially for the poor.[103] Wisconsin butter sold commercially was so bad, so often, that it was called "western grease" in Chicago and sold as lubricant.[104] Other observers in the dairy industry saw things differently. As W.D. Hoard, editor of *Hoard's Dairyman*, founder of the Wisconsin Dairymen's Association (1872) and the single greatest proselytizer of Wisconsin's industrial dairy revolution claimed, the dairy interests did not regard oleomargarine as a great competitor and were "not concerned in the least about the final outcome of butter if given a fair chance to compete with oleomargarine. Oleomargarine masquerading as butter does not provide competition, but substitution. If oleomargarine had from the start entered into competition with butter, then there would never be any action taken against it."[105] While these dairymen argued, margarine was selling fast. By 1880 U.S. margarine manufacturers had reached $7,000,000 in annual production; selling their product on average for 1/3 the cost of butter.[106]

By 1886, twenty-four states had enacted regulatory margarine laws. In the spring of that same year, dairy organizations and interests from some 26 states gathered in New York to, as one organizer explained, to put dairy on "equal footing with its dangerous competition".[107] The meetings produced a

[98] "Bogus Butter," *The Wisconsin State Journal*, February 1, 1881

[99] William Crow, "Legislative Control of Imitation Dairy Products in Wisconsin", *Marquette Law Review*, Vol. XVII No. 2, 1933, 88.

[100] Gerry Strey, "The "Oleo Wars": Wisconsin's Fight over the Demon Spread", Wisconsin Magazine of History, 85, No. 1, (2001), 4.

[101] Strey, 4.

[102] Riepma, 110.

[103] Riepma, 5; Donna J. Wood, "The Strategic Use of Public Policy: Business Support for the 1906 Food and Drug Act," *The Business History Review*, Vol. 59, No. 3 (Autumn, 1985), 408.; Henry Bannard, "The Oleomargarine Law: A Study of Congressional Politics," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 2, No. 4 (Dec., 1887), 549.

[104] Strey, 4.

[105] Strey, 7.

[106] Riepma, 110.

[107] W.T. Mickel, "Margarine Legislation," *Journal of Farm Economics*, Vol. 23 No. 3 (Aug. 1941), 570.

series of recommendations that would serve as the foundation of the 1886 Oleomargarine Act, the first federal law addressing what Minnesota Governor Hubbard decried as a "mechanical mixture" created by "the ingenuity of depraved human genius".[108] The act put in place an excise tax of two cents a pound on domestically produced margarine and fifteen cents on imported oleaginous compounds, as well as enacting large annual licensing fees of $600 for manufacturers, $480 for wholesalers and $48 for retailers. The stipulations of the bill were enforceable with the threat of imprisonment and/or fines up to $1000. The Oleomargarine Act marked the start of an era of vigorous federal regulation of margarine independently of other processed foods, drugs, drinks, and commercial consumables that would last almost seven decades. In that time, while dairy interest-led anti-margarine rhetoric remained steadfast, transforming itself as the raw material inputs and composition of domestic margarine evolved, scores of state legislative forays into discriminatory regulation of margarine brought a patchwork of regulatory regimes, taxes and mandates across the nation. But despite the diversity of these legal constraints, the arguments made by anti-margarine forces can be observed to cohere in three general arguments against producers and peddlers of "bogus butter," as it was widely called in Wisconsin publications of all types.

Against margarine, the powerful dairy interests and their political allies offered three basic arguments or positions in the quest for government intervention: first, that margarine is all too often fraudulently sold as butter; second, some argued margarine is impure in essence and dangerous to the public health; and third, that it be desirous to prohibit the sale of any product appearing to compete with butter. Many offered a combination of the first and second arguments; others, perhaps, argued those two claims in various ways while quietly being of the mind to banish all butter competitors. A good many, though, openly and publically called, as the President of the American Agricultural and Dairy Association did in congressional testimony, for "the total extermination of imitation butter" merely because it seemed to be a competitor.[109]

The first claim of would-be regulators of margarine - that it was commonly and fraudulently sold as butter - was clearly of merit. While the dairy interests no doubt exaggerated the extent of the problem, as the earliest published political historian of federal margarine legislation, Henry C. Bannard, writing in 1887 makes clear, as it was types of foods and drugs, so too "it is certain large quantities of margarine were sold as genuine butter."[110] As the 1908 annual report of the Wisconsin Dairy and Food Commissioner explained, "manufacturers of and dealers in oleomargarine could not be depended upon to label it and sell it for what it actually was".[111] In the few years following Wisconsin's first label-law in 1881, a handful of margarine peddlers were charged and fined under the law.[112] Though few, their presence in the legal record provides proof of the label fraud, which was to be remedied by the law. Ironically, the passage of the margarine laws (especially license fees), both state and federal, seemed to increase the fraud as margarine producers sought to avoid discriminatory fines and fees.[113] Though fraud certainly occurred, calls for the protection of margarine consumers as distinct from the widespread practice of fraudulent adulteration and substitution in foods, drugs, drinks, and products of all kinds raises insistent questions. As a historian of the pure food and drug movement, Donna Wood, explains, fraudulent substitution and adulteration were very common practices across various industries at the time:

> "Cheap yellow sugar flavored with vegetable extracts passed as Vermont maple sugar; colored oleomargarine was sold as butter; fruit jams were often made from peels, cores, and glucose; pepper and other spices were some- times merely ground nutshells; lard was

[108] J. Robert Lilly & Richard A. Ball, "The Menace of Margarine: The Rise and Fall of a Social Problem", Social Problems, Vol. 29, No. 5 (Jun., 1982), 492.
[109] Riepma, 113.
[110] Henry Bannard, "The Oleomargarine Law: A Study of Congressional Politics", *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 2, No. 4 (Dec., 1887), 547.
[111] Crow, 84.
[112] Crow, 86.
[113] Bannard, 555.

> substituted for butterfat in candies, condensed milk, and ice cream; tomato catsup consisting of pumpkin, saccharin, and coal tar colors was not uncommon. A chemical thickener mixed with one pound of butter and a pint of milk quickly produced two pounds of 'butter.'"[114]

A public and political clamor for federal pure-food legislation began in the late 19th century, with various legislation introduced, but not passed, in Congress as early as 1879. Many of these bills addressed pure-food generally, but *more* of them specifically targeted margarine.[115] In 1886, the year of the first federal margarine law, some twenty-one bills were introduced concerning pure-food, but fully sixteen of them were directed solely at margarine.[116] Following the passage of the Oleomargarine Act in that year, it would be twelve years before a general pure-food act would pass Congress. If the frequency of margarine fraud could be observed to surpass that of every other domestic consumable, the lengthy precession of its regulation before every other food product, liquor and pharmaceutical sold in the country may not be as "highly illogical and inconsistent" as one historian of margarine laws, W.T Mickel, believes. But the historical record does not bear out such a frequency.[117] In fact, it was the dairy industry that constantly found itself at the center of public health scandals of sanitation and fraud, particularly in the big cities.[118]

The regulation of margarine color followed soon behind the initial forays by states into label laws in response to the perceived failure of early labeling measures and taxation. In 1895 Wisconsin passed new legislation that prohibited the sale of margarine colored in imitation of butter. This would mark the start of the widespread employment of the legal definition of yellow as the natural domain of butter, and the restriction of colored margarine – a weapon the dairy industry would wield successfully for decades. The first major amendment to the 1886 Oleomargarine Act came in 1902, as Congress joined in the restriction and taxation of the practice of margarine coloring. The amendment, called the Grout Bill after the Representative of the dairy-laden state of Vermont who crafted the amendment, created what would be a longstanding differential federal tax rate for colored and un-colored margarine, and gave states more leeway in their own regulatory advances. The passage of the Grout Bill was, as one historian of Wisconsin called it, "the greatest legislative victory over margarine," and the years immediately following its passage saw the largest drop in margarine production in its history.[119] National production dropped from 126 million pounds in 1902 to 73 million pounds in 1903, as the new federal tax rate of 10 cents per pound on colored margarine, as opposed to ¼ cent tax on un-colored, made colored margarine as expensive as the cheaper grades of butter.[120] The color issue would dog margarine for decades, and some states went so far as to attempt to mandate margarine produced inside their borders be colored pink, or brown. These measures may seem peculiar in light of the widespread practice by butter producers of coloring their own product - often with annatto, the same vegetable substance most often used to color margarine.[121] This point was made a number of times during Congressional testimony and debate leading up to the passage of the Grout Bill, but dairy interests countered by arguing their own coloring was merely in attempt to make their butter, produced throughout the year, more resemble the natural color of "June butter" – typically the most yellow-colored butter of the year as a result of herd diet changes in the spring.[122] This claiming of an essential yellowness by butter producers would give rise to a parade of

[114] Mickel, 570.
[115] Mickel, 570.
[116] Mickel, 570.
[117] Bannard, 556-7.
[118] P. J. Atkins, "Sophistication Detected: Or, the Adulteration of the Milk Supply, 1850-1914," *Social History* 16, no. 3 (October 1991), 322.

[119] Strey, 4.
[120] Strey, 7.
[121] Riepma, 114.
[122] Crow, 94.

elaborate, and at times absurd, proposals, debates and eventually successful attempts to create a standard by which the yellow of butter might be protected.[123]

The second argument advanced most often by anti-margarine forces claimed the fat was in essence a "deleterious" and "vile compound," as an 1881 editorial in the *Wisconsin State Journal* did. Though this argument receded slightly in the face of federal legislation that, of course, singled out margarine as separate and un-equal, but also simultaneously sanctioned its place among products fit for inter-state commerce, and thus consumption. But the dairy interests were unconvinced. In a manner illustrative of anti-margarine rhetoric in general, the 13th Annual Report of the Wisconsin Dairymen's Association exhorted the "filthy product" of a "contemptible business" which, if not closely regulated, "will palm off cholera hogs' lard for butter."[124]

An early and definitive answer to the question of margarine's essential wholesomeness came from Professor C. F. Chandler, of the Department of Chemistry, Columbia University in 1881, the same year Wisconsin passed its first law. Tasked with this question by the New York City Board of Health, Dr. Chandler was direct in his conclusions: "The product is palatable and wholesome, can be made of uniform quality the year round, is in every respect superior as an article of food to a large proportion of dairy butter sold in this city, and can be manufactured at a much lower price. I regard it as a most valuable article of food and consider it entirely unexceptional in every respect. In this opinion I am supported by the best scientific authorities in the country..."[125] Dr. Harvey W. Willey, founder of the Federal Bureau of Chemistry, the leading voice in American science against food adulteration and key supporter of the Pure Foods Act of 1906, came to the same conclusion that Chandler had, finding margarine "a wholesome food which was inexpensive enough for everyone" after an intense compositional and chemical analysis.[126] Despite the clean bill of health Willey, Chandler and others repeatedly bestowed upon margarine, the dairy interests were relentless - going so far as to fraudulently concoct "margarine" samples for Congressional analysis during the debate preceding passage of the 1886 Oleomargarine Act.[127] Despite the often-dramatic protestations of dairy groups to the contrary, margarine was widely held as wholesome, nutritious and safe. Furthermore, the passage of the Pure Food and Drug Act in 1906 erected standardized regulations that included margarine, which should have laid to rest continued claims of margarine's deleterious essence. But continue they did, perhaps nowhere more frequently than in Wisconsin, often in later decades transforming slightly into an argument positing an essential nutritional deficiency in margarine. Following the 1906 Pure Food and Drug Act and state law changes following its enactment, only those challenging margarine on the discriminatory basis of mere competition can be said to, in a sense, remain. As the significant exposed fallacies of the two central objections to margarine by dairy groups and their allies, as well as the ample regulatory assurances brought forth by their efforts, have demonstrated, the pursuit of margarine legislation is primarily, if not totally, an attempt to stifle legal commercial competition.

What perhaps makes the dairy groups' dramatic drive to exterminate margarine in light of these retrospective realities so peculiar is a long record of economic analyses in consensus that margarine was never much of a threat. In arguing that taxes on margarine "fall almost completely upon those who are least able to bear it," W. T. Mickel cites a study by the United States Bureau of Agricultural Economics which found that the vast majority of margarine sales are to those households who find butter to be prohibitively expensive, and as Mickel puts it, "in order for butter to gain any considerable part of the margarine market… the price of butter must be reduced so that those who now buy margarine will feel they can afford to buy butter."[128] This is a finding supported by the most comprehensive study of the

[123] House Committee on Agriculture, "*Bills Proposing to Amend Oleomargarine Laws*", Washington: Government Printing Office, 1912.
[124] Crow, 86.
[125] Mickel, 577.
[126] Ball and Lilly, 492.
[127] Bannard, 580.
[128] Mickel, 580.

economics of margarine in the literature, William H. Nicholls' *Some Economic Aspects of the Margarine Industry*, published in 1946. Not only does Nicholls support the findings of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, but he also finds a strong correlation with margarine and lard, and not margarine and butter – because, he says, of the prohibitive expense of the latter. As Nicholls argues, margarine must not be understood merely as an ""inferior" good relative to butter, but a "superior" good relative to some other edible fat such as lard."[129] A number of other economic analyses come to the same conclusions, and as two historians of the topic put it rather directly, "the consumption of margarine never increased at the expense of butter, restrictions upon the former never benefitted the latter, and there is no evidence that the sale of margarine depressed butter prices."[130] The other important point that Nicholls emphasizes is the structural disadvantage butter faced in the hope of seizing market share from margarine, as butter was produced solely with what milk fats are left after milk production. As Nicholls explains, "…butter is quite different from that of margarine. Butter is essentially the residual claimant of the total milk supply. Hence, the "surpluses" available for butter production tend to increase in depression and contract in more prosperous times. " Thus, the vitriol directed at margarine by dairy organizations seems at best misdirected, and at bottom, somewhat strange. On the other hand, the passion of dairy interests and their supporters may seem less peculiar given the degree of success previous campaigns undergirded by a close dairy-state alliance, and backed by the seemingly incontrovertible claims of science and scientific agriculture. But perhaps more interesting is the particular manner in which progressive discourse paved the way for the kinds of regulatory capture Gabriel Kolko insists is the key to progressive era, and is clearly glimpsed in this case.

In a particularly revealing passage by H. C. Thom, the first dairy and food commissioner of Wisconsin, the symbolic import of butter as a proxy for the men and women who fueled the various projects, protests and programs now seen as examples of progressivism, is quite evident. Writing in 1890, Thom complained:

"Butter has worked all these years to make for itself a market and a demand. Now that they are established it should not be robbed by an imitation. The attack has just begun. No corner of the state is too remote for its presence. No table so humble, no dining room so grand, no lumber camp so rough, that oleomargarine, with its mellow name, will not walk upon and into, with a deceitful bow and brazen smile, with the claim that its name is butter."[131]

But as we have seen, things were not so simple.

Conclusion

Mark Twain's *Life on the Mississippi* is essentially the combination of two, or more, distinct texts: the first, a bucolic raft of official and personal histories and scenes of life on the river – parts of which were first published in 1873 – and the second, a conglomeration of scenes of American greed, graft and gullibility, still on the Mississippi but much more tendentious in tone that first appeared alongside the earlier text when the book was first published in 1917. One scene in the latter half of the book involves two traveling, urban "drummers," businessmen or salesmen, sitting down at a late breakfast on a riverboat; as they chat, their sentiments are "overheard" by Twain.[132] Eating, one of them points to the table:

> "Now as to this article," said Cincinnati, slashing into the ostensible butter and holding forward a slab of it on his knife-blade, "it's from our house; look at it—smell of it—taste it. Put any test on it you want to. Take your own time—no hurry— make it thorough. There now—what do you say? butter, ain't it? Not by a thundering sight—it's

[129] William H. Nicholls, "Some Economic Aspects of the Margarine Industry", *The Journal of Political Economy*, Vol. 54, No. 3 (Jun., 1946), 226.
[130] Ball & Lilly, 491.
[131] Crow, 84.
[132] Twain, Mark. *Life on the Mississippi*. (Chicago: Harper & Brothers, 1917), 327-328.

> oleomargarine! Yes, sir, that's what it is—oleomargarine. You can't tell it from butter; by George, an expert can't! It's from our house. We supply most of the boats in the West; there's hardly a pound of butter on one of them. We are crawling right along—jumping right along is the word. We are going to have that entire trade. Yes, and the hotel trade, too. You are going to see the day, pretty soon, when you can't find an ounce of butter to bless yourself with, in any hotel in the Mississippi and Ohio valleys, outside of the biggest cities. Why, we are turning out oleomargarine now by the thousands of tons. And we can sell it so dirt-cheap that the whole country has got to take it—can't get around it, you see. Butter don't stand any show— there ain't any chance for competition. Butter's had its day—and from this out, butter goes to the wall. There's more money in oleomargarine than —why, you can't imagine the business we do. I've stopped in every town, from Cincinnati to Natchez; and I've sent home big orders from every one of them."[133]

The values and fears that informed Twain's scene here seem to get at the core of the success of dairy's campaign for state intervention against margarine, and perhaps more importantly the values and fears of the era that so informed that campaign. It was a time of threats impenetrable to the naked-eye and to the mind; of bacteria and disease; of elite, backroom graft largely undetectable to the average man. The senses fail to aid in the discovery of the truth about table spread, in Twain' emphasis; even "an expert can't" help but be fooled. And the scale of it is simply too much to stop it, "the whole country has got to take it." Twain's telling scene works along the lines of the, largely disproven, arguments of the dairy interests; positioning margarine as a symbol of new order of epistemic uncertainty and unequal odds, as a spreadable, edible version of modern, rapacious industrial capitalism. And while the irony of the modern, commercial dairymen positioning themselves as the bucolic victims of a vast corporate evil is perhaps lost on Twain, what makes the dairyman's claims effective is certainly not. Robert Wiebe's "search for order" can be, in some sense, clearly glimpsed in the sentiment of Twain's scene, as Americans tried and failed to make sense of this changing "society without a core" by trying to "impose the known upon the unknown".[134] Thus, for Twain, the inability to even *discern* the difference between butter or margarine acts as a stand in for the whole of the unfocused uncertainty roiling the river of American life. It is precisely this sentiment that worked to the advantage of dairymen, and precisely this kind of progressive notion that puts dairymen firmly in the discourse of the reform tradition of the era, and thus must be understood in terms of progressivism.

"They failed," Wiebe insists, "usually without recognizing why; and that failure to comprehend a society they were helping to make contained the essence of the nation's story."[135] The history of the organization and modernization of dairymen, on the other hand, is one of a great deal of practical success. And furthermore, that success that was precisely predicated by a repeated process of imposing the known on the unknown, in ways perhaps not intended by Wiebe's claim. While the attempted assassination of margarine by dairy interests did indeed fail, as Wiebe insists, it may be that what is most interesting about the history specialized dairymen is what they got right, and what that success can say about the nature of the elusive notion of progressivism.

---

[133] Twain, Mark. *Life on the Mississippi*. (Chicago: Harper & Brothers, 1917), 328.

[134] Wiebe, 12.

[135] Wiebe, 12.

Bibliography

Alliance, International Co-operative. *Cartel*. International Co-operative Alliance., 1950.

Association, Michigan Dairymen's. *Annual report of the Michigan Dairymen's Association*. Ann Arbor: The Association, Office of the Secretary, 1908.

Association, Wisconsin Dairymen's. *Annual report of the Wisconsin Dairymen's Association*, Madison: WDA, 1901.

Atkins, P. J. "Sophistication Detected: Or, the Adulteration of the Milk Supply, 1850-1914." *Social History* 16, no. 3 (October 1991): 317-339.

Ball, J. Robert & Lilly, Robert A.,"The Menace of Margarine: The Rise and Fall of a Social Problem", *Social Problems*, Vol. 29, No. 5 (Jun., 1982), pp. 488-498.

Bannard, Henry "The Oleomargarine Law: A Study of Congressional Politics", *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 2, No. 4 (Dec., 1887), pp. 545-557.

Beecher, Catharine, and Harriet Stowe. *American Woman's Home*. Baltimore: Applewood Books, 2008.

"Bogus Butter," *The Wisconsin State Journal*, February 1, 1881.

Chicago Tribune, February 28, 1910.

Cochrane, Willard Wesley. *The development of American agriculture: a historical analysis*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.

Commission, United States. Federal Trade. *Report of the Federal trade commission on milk and milk products, 1914-1918*. Washington D.C.: GPO, 1921.

Congressional Record. 49th Cong., 2d sess., 1887. Vol. 17, no. 4178.

Congressional Record. 48th Cong., 1s sess., 1886. Vol. 15., no. 3891.

Congressional Record. 47th Cong. 2d sess, 1885. Vol 12, no. 2113.

Congressional Record. 54th Cong. 1s sess. 1902. Vol. 22. no. 7314.

Coppin, Clayton A., and Jack C. High. *The politics of purity: Harvey Washington Wiley and the origins of Federal Food Policy*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999.

Crow, William, "Legislative Control of Imitation Dairy Products in Wisconsin", *Marquette Law Review*, Vol. XVII No. 2, 1933, pp. 83-100.

Diner, Steven J. *A Very Different Age: Americans of the Progressive Era*. New York: Macmillan, 1998.

Dupre, Ruth. ""If It's Yellow, It Must be Butter": Margarine Regulation in North America Since 1886". *The Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 59, No. 2 (Jun., 1999), pp. 353-371.

Filene, Peter G. "An Obituary for "The Progressive Movement"." *American Quarterly* 22, no. 1 (Spring 1970): 20-34.

Finance, United States. Congress. Senate. Committee on. *Oleomargarine tax repeal*. Washington D.C.: G.P.O., 1948.

Genesee farmer. B.F. Smith & Co., 1857.

Grover, Kathryn. *Dining in America, 1850-1900*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1987.

Heick, W. H. *A propensity to protect: butter, margarine and the rise of urban culture in Canada*. Toronto: Wilfrid Laurier Univ. Press, 1991.

Hicks, John D. *Populist Revolt: A History of the Farmers' Alliance and the People's Party*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 2009.

Hoard's Dairyman, June 11, 1915.

Hofstadter, Richard. *The Age of Reform*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1955, 135-40.

House Committee on Agriculture, "*Bills Proposing to Amend Oleomargarine Laws*", Washington: Government Printing Office, 1912.

Johnson, Keach. "Iowa Dairying at the Turn of the Century: The New Agriculture and Progressivism." *Agricultural History* 45, no. 2 (April 1971): 95-110.

Kolko, Gabriel. *The triumph of conservatism: a re-interpretation of American history, 1900-1916*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1977.

Lampard, Eric. *The Rise of the Dairy Industry in Wisconsin: A Study in Agricultural Change 1829-1920*, Madison: State Historical Society, 1963.

Marcus, Alan I. "The Ivory Silo: Farmer-Agricultural College Tensions in the 1870s and 1880s." *Agricultural History* 60, no. 2 (Spring 1986): 22-36.

McMurry, Sally Ann. *Transforming rural life: dairying families and agricultural change, 1820-1885*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995.

Mickle, W.T. "Margarine Legislation", *Journal of Farm Economics*, Vol. 23 No. 3 (Aug. 1941), pp. 567-583.

Miller, Geoffey P. "Public Choice at the Dawn of the Special Interest State: The Story of Butter and Margarine." *California Law Review* 77 (1989): 83.

Nelson, Daniel. *Farm and factory: workers in the Midwest, 1880-1990*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995.

New York Times, March 1, 1910.

New York State Agriculture Society, *Transactions*. New York: NYSAS, 841.

Nicholls, William H. "Some Economic Aspects of the Margarine Industry", *The Journal of Political Economy*, Vol. 54, No. 3 (Jun., 1946), pp. 221-242.

Osman, Loren H. *W.D. Hoard: a man for his time*. Ft. Atkinson: Hoard's Dairyman Books, 1985.

Pegram, Thomas R. "Public Health and Progressive Dairying in Illinois." *Agricultural History* 65, no. 1 (Winter 1991): 36-50.

Sanders, Elizabeth. *Roots of reform: farmers, workers, and the American state, 1877-1917*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999.

Schlebecker, John T., and Andrew W. Hopkins. *A history of dairy journalism in the United States, 1810-1950*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1957.

Shaffer, Joseph. *A history of agriculture in Wisconsin*. Madison, Wisconsin: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1922.

Sheboygan County News, February 17th, 1891.

Shurtleff, William, and Akiko Aoyagi. *Hydrogenation, margarine, and shortening*. Los Angeles: Soyfoods Center, 1996.

Strey, Gerry. "The "Oleo Wars": Wisconsin's Fight over the Demon Spread", *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, Vol. 85, No. 1, (Feb. 2001), pp. 3-15.

Stromquist, Shelton. *Reinventing "The People": the progressive movement, the class problem, and the origins of modern liberalism*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006.

Thelen, David Paul. *The new citizenship: origins of progressivism in Wisconsin, 1885-1900*. St. Louis: University of Missouri Press, 1972.

Tonkovich, Nicole. *The American Woman's Home by Catharine E. Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe*. Baltimore: Rutgers University Press, 2002.

Twain, Mark. *Life on the Mississippi*. Chicago: Harper & Brothers, 1917.

Wiebe, Robert H. *The Search for Order, 1877-1920*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1967.

Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, *First Annual Report* of the State Dairy and Food Commissioner, 1890. Madison: State Publications, 1890.

Wisconsin Farmer, 1, 1854.