

Chapter 8

1969 – 1973

This is the chapter of excitement and the beginning of the real breakthrough in moving dairies to the Central Valley. Personally it was a very busy time as Marlys and I had a growing family and both of us were very involved in the organization and the building of a new church. Marlys bowled in a city league and most of my extra time was my involvement in the church on many levels.

It was a beautiful time of a growing family, a growing church and a growing community as well as a growing dairy community.

It was during this time that the Dutch Community really began to grow. Several Dutch families purchased properties in Tulare County who did not actually move to the area. They saw a Dutch community being established that they felt comfortable with and were willing to invest alongside of the settlers. Among those purchasing during this period were Louis Mensonides who purchased a walnut grove and Jerry Lanting who purchased walnuts close to the Visalia city limits. Those who purchased open land for dairy sites but did not move to Tulare County included: Jim Koning, Charles Rusticus, Art Leyendekker, Rouwenhorst, Ron Hilarides, Clarence Vander Wiede, Oldengarm, Charles Dirkse, Johnny Schooneveld, Len Slegers, Frank Hilarides, De Bruyn, Hubert Slegers, and George teVelde Sr.

John De Graaf and family purchased land on several occasions and was mainly in the equipment business, selling tractors, loaders, etc. to the dairy industry. The original purchase was for 100 acres on the northwest corner of Rd 60 and Hwy 198 west of Visalia. At a price of \$100,000 he bought 100 acres with a custom 2,500 sq. ft. home, rental home and shop. John was involved with Melvin Rossiter on several properties which they used to build “spec” dairies. John also built a dairy on his 100 acres (across from Allen Bakker) and rented it out for a number of years. (John & Gladys came from Arizona) It was during this time that John Bothof came from Escondido established the Bothof Bakery in Visalia, using it to sell some Dutch delicacies.

A number of dairymen purchased land in Kings County to construct a dairy. Included in these were Louis Struikmen and son, Joe Veenendaal, Henry Van Dyk, Henry Veenendaal and Pete Koopmans. It's here where things get a little foggy for me as I'm sure there were a few others who came to Kings County during this time. Butch Sybesma also came and dairied for many years but I have no record of when he arrived.

Other Dutch people in dairy related work moved in from other areas as well as Dutch people who had no direct, or just indirect ties to the industry.

Jay teVelde moved back to Chino during this time where he was able to buy his own dairy.



*Federal Land Bank Assoc.
Phil Wright, Joe Akkerman, Ken Billings*



*Dairy Builders: Dairy Construction Inc.
Larry Rosstier, Melvin Rossiter,
Unidentified, George Wright*



*Dairy Equipment: Wasnick Bros.
Bob Wasnick & Danny Wasnick*

The above represent 3 companies that were an integral part of getting the dairy development off the ground and keeping the momentum going.

Gerrit and Susan Anker, who had been leasing a facility from Tom De Vries in Artesia, came to Visalia and settled on the Gary Eilers dairy east of Visalia, the place Tom & Grace Byl moved from, to their own facility in northeast Tulare. (1969)



Dairy leased to Gerrit Anker in 1971



Dairy purchased by Wilber Mellema in 1970

In 1969, John Zylstra left the Zylstra Bros. partnership in Artesia and purchased a feedlot north of Visalia, to which he added a veal raising facility. It consisted of 50 acres with a home, haybarn and a set of corrals, all for \$75,000.

At this time Frank Leyendekker began purchasing land; 100 acres south of Exeter and a 240 acre parcel north of Visalia where a new facility was built.

In early 1970 Al & Lillian Bakker came up from their rental facility in Artesia and purchased 60 acres on Hwy 198 and Rd 60, just west of Hwy 99. Total price: \$57,500. They began construction soon after the purchase. The price seems cheap today – it was high producing land with a good well, although for farming purposes it would not be easy to cash flow at that price.

Their friends, the Wilbur Mellema family came up the same year to purchase an 80 acre parcel on Ave 320, just north of Visalia. This parcel included a couple of homes and an older dairy facility for a total of \$70,000! The price was indicative of the dairy economics of that day! Today, Mike Mellema operates the dairy with expansion of facilities and acres.

Next to Mellema, just a couple of months later, Mark and Arlene Tiersma purchased an 80 acre parcel for just \$55,000. Mark & Arlene came from a dairy in Sanger and soon had their own built – fully graded, with a herringbone barn and a very nice home. Ben Tiersma operates the dairy today.



Tom Byl Dairy 1970



Mark Tiersma Dairy 1971

Before Mark & Arlene built, they sold off 40 acres (without the well) to Ralph and Grace Schotanus who came to Tulare county from Imperial County (heat for them was not a problem). The Tiersma's had been somewhat reluctant to sell the 40, but the cash sure worked in their development plans and since Schotanus came from a leased facility the land cost figures were a win – win for both families at \$30,000.

I got acquainted with an older man, Otto Jones, who was a farmland broker. One of the finest in the business and a person I highly respected. His family at one time had a "Cash & Carry" dairy on the edge of Visalia. Otto found a lot of land for me to sell, and sell we did! Land was really cheap compared to Chino and selling during that period became relatively easy as we not only had lots of buyers, but also lots of sellers. (An extremely unusual situation in real estate!)

During 1971 and 1972 we averaged selling 1.25 dairy sites per month. It was a period of lots of construction which brought new employment opportunities to many people. Melvin Rossiter (Dairy Construction Inc.) was the primary builder during this time period. Permits were easy, plans were extremely simple and it was not unusual to complete a turn key facility in 120 days.

John & Effie Christoffels purchased a 77 acre parcel of land east of Tulare for their new dairy.

Pete and Ann Dragt came from Chino and bought an 80 acre parcel of undeveloped land north of Visalia and got a bargain at \$400 per acre. Over the next few years they purchased additional land until they owned an entire section of 640 acres.

Harold & Jeannette Dragt, a brother to Pete, and also from Chino, bought a parcel close to Pete but was not successful in building at that location due to the Sequoia airfield next door. As I recall, this was the first instance of resistance to the construction of a dairy. Had Harold built immediately after purchase it could have been done, as dairy permitting did not begin until a year or two later. It also was an undeveloped parcel. (80 acres at \$400 per acre)

Early in 1971, Frank Borba purchased a 40 acre parcel north of the Allen Bakker's site. Borba was from Chino and relocated his dairy to Visalia.

Two dairymen purchased parcels side by side from one seller. Both parcels were underdeveloped land (virgin soil). Henry & Frances Kampen got an 80 acre parcel for \$500 per acre and John and Margaret Zwaagstra got a 60 acre parcel for \$500 per acre. These were the first sales where one could actually see an increase in the price of land as these parcels were located north of Visalia, where earlier sales for the same type of land had been at \$400 per acre.

Fred & Sally Kampen also picked an undeveloped parcel of land – 70 acres for \$45,000. Today that dairy is only 1 ½ miles from the Visalia City limits. At the time of the purchase it seemed way out in the "boonies" as it was located north of the St John's River and there were really no neighbors in sight.

Arie & Lucy Verkaik purchased what was one of my larger land sales at the time. A 160 acres parcel north of Visalia on Ave 360 and across from where Frank Leyendekker was planning to build. (160 for \$60,000) At the time it had frontage on a dirt road. Tulare County, happy to see new dairies, did not take much urging to pave the road. The area was plagued as a flood zone with sheet flow, and remains much the same today. The soil was

very tough and even with the help of lots of cow manure, took years to develop. I think the seller was happy to sell at that price.

There was a 160 acres parcel next to the one that the Verkaik's bought. Dennis & Margie Boertje were interested in it but really wanted only 80 acres of it. They purchased the west 80 acres and we sold the other 80 to Jerry Lanting from Bellflower. Some 30 +/- years later the Boertje's bought the other 80. Initially each 80 was undeveloped and was purchased at \$400 per acre. The later purchase by Boertje was over 8 times the original price. While writing about this transaction I remember that we split the 160 acres without having to obtain a parcel map, in fact, all we did was to have the Title Co. write a legal description. No survey, no maps, no hearing for approval! We've sure created a lot of government jobs since that time!

Oppedyk brothers purchased an 80 acres parcel late in 1971 and constructed a dairy on it which some years later was sold to Butch Dias.

The last dairy people to make a purchase in 1971 were Bill & Annie Van Beek who located on an 80 acre parcel north of Visalia – actually south of Dinuba, since they had a Dinuba address. Today, 3 of the 5 Van Beek Sons operate dairies in the Tulare area. The 80 acres next to Bill & Annie was purchased by J. Koetsier from So. Cal. and I believe, was later sold to the VanderHam dairy.

During that year John DeGraaf and Melvin Rossiter bought an 80 acre parcel on the Dinuba Hwy (Rd 80) and built a “spec” dairy. Before completion it was sold to Earl Wiersma. After a number of years it became the Gerrit and Ruth Griffioen dairy.

Also during that year John & Gladys DeGraaf built a dairy across from Allen Bakker and leased it to Jim & Tracy Tiersma, who purchased the facility at a later date.

1972 began with a sale to Rouwenhorst of 160 acres in what was beginning to become a dairy area north of Visalia. It was purchased from Gabe and Tony Pacheco at a price of \$650 per acre. Years later it was sold to the Zysling family.

The next dairyman from Artesia to purchase was Ronald Hilarides who purchased 160 acres for \$725 per acre. He held it a couple of years and then sold it to Hubert VanderHam, also from Artesia. Ron Moved from Artesia to Oakdale.

Henry & Margie Koetsier from Chino looked at a number of parcels, made an offer on an 80 and then decided they needed more land and bought a 116 acre parcel on Caldwell Ave, southwest of Visalia. Today the dairy remains in the Koetsier family. Henry was one of the first to install a rotary barn and also one of the first to install a digester. Both projects met with a measure of success and failure that were stepping stones for the next generation of improved equipment. Henry proved to be a real pioneer.

Ed Souza came to Tulare County from the coast and purchased 80 acres to relocate his herd to a parcel of fine land west of Tulare. The purchase price was \$1,000 per acre.

Chuck Dirkse bought a couple of parcels in 1972 and 1973 and subsequently sold them to the Knudson dairy.

Johnny Schoonevelt purchased an 80 southwest of Dinuba in 1972 for \$800 per acre, but never moved from the southland and sold the property to a fruit grower.

There was a dairyman named Oldengarm who purchased 80 acres in 1972 for \$700 per acre. I have really forgotten what property he bought and where it was located. It seems he bought to build a dairy and then later decided not to move here and sold the property.

The DeJong – Griffioen families purchased 500 acres southeast of Tulare and Will & Ellie Griffioen dairied there for many years before selling the property to the College of the Sequoias. This was one of the largest parcels I sold up to that time and it seemed for most dairymen to be a very large piece of land for a dairy.

In January of 1973 we sold 160 acres to Len Slegers, a Southland dairyman who did not move but resold it to the Vanderham family. In the same month his brother Hubert purchased 160 acres and like his brother, did not build but sold it – actually traded out of it into another 160 acres which was later purchased by Jay teVelde.

Ben Furer purchased 154 acres southwest of Dinuba as did Frank Hilarides (157 acres) which was sold at a later date.

The De Bruyn family, from the Escalon area, purchased 80 acres on Road 80 south of Dinuba and planned to build a dairy but re-sold at a later date.

Gary and Helen Zysling purchased 100 acres on Ave 368. They came from Chino and built a dairy on that site, living there for many years. Their friends from Chino, Ray and Gertie Kroes, purchased one of the first dairy sites west of Tipton.

Hubert Vander Ham from Artesia purchased 160 acres north of Visalia in 1973 and 400 acres in 1976. He built what was, at the time, one of the larger dairies. (approx 1,000 cows if I remember right) Vander Ham was one of the few in the early 70's who actually sold property in the Southland for subdivision and exchanging that into the land at Visalia.

Also in 1973 George teVelde Sr. from Ontario purchased a 256 acre parcel.

The last dairyman to purchase a dairy site in 1973 was Ed and Avis Gruenstien from the Coast. They owned a herd of purebred Holsteins. They located on a 160 acres parcel between Tulare and Strathmore. It had a good livable home and sold for \$1,200 per acre.

Toward the end of 1973 we saw land prices firm up as a lot of the available land was being sold.

Other new dairies were built during this time, some in Kings County, some in Tulare, and not all were of Dutch decent, such as “Doc” Lionel Brazil, Lee Coito and Aqui dairy. Also included is the Richard Veeman and Sons dairy west of Strathmore, although I cannot remember when they built their facility.

I'm sure I am missing some, and if your name has been omitted and you bought land for a dairy during 1965 – 1973, please contact me and we will have you included in the final version of this manuscript.

Chapter 9

To be continued.....