

PA Milk Marketing Board  
Carol A. Hardbarger

*Some Interesting Facts about Milk Processing in Pennsylvania*

I recently conducted a survey on the milk processing industry in the Commonwealth, specifically on Class I processing plants, meaning those that process fluid milk. A total of 54 Class I processors are licensed by the Board; 35 of those are headquartered and have plants in Pennsylvania. The 35 Class I fluid milk processing plants in Pennsylvania are found in 23 different counties.

Nineteen processors have headquarters in other states and are licensed to sell Class I products. Our records show that the majority of these companies have multiple plants, some of which are close to our borders; their in-state sales vary from year to year.

One of the most interesting things I learned about our **in-state** processors is that most of them began in the period 1920-1940 as family businesses. The reason for the rapid increase in processing plants at that time had a lot to do with rural electrification, an increase in good roads and availability of modern delivery vehicles. The majority of these plants are still operating in the same locations today and remain family businesses.

Out-of-state processors have tended to expand their operations to multiple sites, while Pennsylvania's processors usually operate out of one plant. This has presented challenges for them as they have lost area dairy farms and milk must be brought from farther away. Pennsylvania's processing plants also remain "relatively small" in terms of their numbers of employees with a Median of 52. The survey data noted that finding workers, however, in their rural areas is often a challenge. It is especially difficult to find employees with some knowledge of dairy operations.

What impresses me the most is the resilience of the relatively small, family-owned milk processing operations we are fortunate to have in Pennsylvania. Fluid milk consumption has declined by 40 percent since 1975 yet these processors, despite declining consumption, dairy farm closures and changes in their customer bases, have remained in business and continue to be a viable part of the dairy industry and economy in the state.

**How can you support Pennsylvania's important dairy processing industry?** There is a way. As I indicated in a previous article, purchasing milk with a 42- plant code ensures it has been processed in Pennsylvania, most likely using milk from Pennsylvania cows. Look before you buy and help PMMB support our in-state dairy processors!

PMMB is always available to respond to questions and concerns. I can be reached at 717-210-8244 or by email at [chardbarga@pa.gov](mailto:chardbarga@pa.gov).