

TUALATIN HISTORICAL SOCIETY
TRANSCRIPT #24

This is a program presented to the Tualatin Historical Society on September 6, 2000 by Barbara Koch Kern on Early Day Farming in Tualatin. These are the notes she used to give her talk.

FAMILY FARMS

Thank you for inviting me to talk about farming. I have been a city slicker for many years, but my heart is still on the farm.

Our family, Mother, Dad, Shirley, Lloyd, myself, Kay and Jakie, our hired man, (who was more like a grandfather), moved from the St. Paul – Newberg area to our farm in Tualatin in October of 1938.

Almost all farms at that time used horses to do their farming. The average size family farm was about 40 acres. We got our first tractor in 1941.

Early on, farm families raised everything they needed to eat to sustain life. Main meals were meat, potatoes, fresh or canned vegetables, fresh or canned fruit, home made bread, milk, and pie or cake on Sunday. Breakfast would usually consist of eggs, bacon, ham, potatoes, hot cakes, cooked cereal and probably milk or coffee.

There were three meals served a day – breakfast, dinner and supper. Lunch was a meal at school!

The family farm would include pastures, land for raising grain and hay for the livestock and probably a cash crop of berries and orchards of fruit or nuts. Family farms raised onions, apples, berries, prunes or plums, cherries, chickens, pears, pigs, cows, green beans and nuts. A cash crop meant fruit or vegetables that were delivered to the canneries in Sherwood or Springbrook

In the harvest season, many women and older kids worked in the cannery. Any age person could work in the field at picking berries, beans and nuts. Years ago a chicken farmer would be able to make a living with a thousand hens. Now it takes several thousand hens to make a living.

Pigs were raised for family use as well as sold for wiener pigs and market hogs. Wiener pigs are about 6 to 8 weeks old, and market hogs are about 6 months old and weigh about 225 pounds. Now they want them to weigh about 265 pounds.

Many times the wiener pigs were sold to a neighbor, so they were put in a gunny sack and transported in the trunk or back seat of the family car. Market hogs were taken to the stock yards in Portland. In our case, they were transported in a very faithful green trailer pulled behind the family car.

Early on, hogs were butchered at home with neighbors helping. Almost every farm had a smoke house for smoking hams and bacon. They were then put in salty gunny sacks and in our family, were hung in our attic or stored in the oat bin.

The lard was rendered down and used as we use shortening. Some meat was ground into sausage and partially cooked. The intestines were cleaned out and the sausage put inside the casings, then stored in a brine in a crock or preserved in some rendered lard. Other parts of the hog were used according to the nationality of the different families. The rest of the meat was given to neighbors and relatives and when

they butchered, they returned the favor. Today there is very little hog production in western Oregon. Some breeding stock, but not for market hogs.

When they butchered beef, it was handled in about the same way, except to preserve it. Most of it was canned or put in a brine.

DAIRIES

Years ago almost every family had a Bessie cow. But there were many small dairies. They mainly sold cream to creameries and cheese factories, which meant you had to separate the cream from the milk after each milking. This was done in a separator. You had to run the separator at the right speed in order to get all the cream out. Next you had to wash all that greasy equipment – twice a day –using soda and/or borax. (I can't really remember which, unfortunately. Detergents had not yet been discovered.) The cream was stored in cream cans or milk cans, which had to be kept cool because the creamery truck only came twice a week, and you were docked if the cream turned sour. We kept our cans cool by wrapping wet gunny sacks around them. We had to take them down to the road to be picked up early. Most small dairies milked by hand until the late 40's or 50's. Then more dairies went to selling whole milk, which meant rigid rules for handling milk.

Cows had to be milked on cement floors. Cows udders had to be washed with a disinfectant. Milking was done with milking machines. You would pour the milk into a bucket, then lift the bucket as high as your head into a bowl that ran down through a pipe to a strainer with a filter, then into milk cans. In later years the milk ran through pipes then a filter, then into a refrigerated storage tank, cooled and held at a certain temperature, so it would not sour. A tanker truck picked up the milk every other day.

To have a Grade A dairy, you had to have a milk house, which was a separate room off of the barn. And again, all the equipment was washed with a strong soap, rinsed and put on racks to dry.

An inspector came every so often to see that you were doing everything right. Now there are few dairies in this area. What used to be a dairy of 80 cows, now has to have 300+ cows to make a living.

ONION GROWING

There was a fair amount of families around Tualatin that made their living at growing vegetables and onions. The onion growers grew their onions on beaver dam soil. They planted in the spring after the water drained off. Many kids in this area weeded onions in the summer. This was a back breaking job. Then they pulled onions in the fall and left them in the field to dry.

The onions were then picked up and stored in an onion house, topped, graded, bagged and trucked either to the Cipole or Malloy siding. There the onions were loaded into railroad cars and shipped off. The onions were a high quality onion and they stored well. But onions are no longer grown here. Eastern Washington has the market now and grows huge quantities of them.

TRUCK GARDENING

There were many truck farmers in the area and some were of Japanese decent. After Pearl Harbor was bombed, the Japanese people had to leave their farms to go to concentration camps in Portland, Idaho, and some were sent to the mid-west.

The Filipinos came to work the truck farms while the Japanese were gone. When the Japanese returned, some of the Filipinos stayed in the area and continued to farm.

In truck gardening, the produce was taken out of the field, washed, trimmed and packed in crates. It was then loaded on to trucks, ready to be transported to the early market, leaving the farm at 3:00 a.m. The market was located on 11th and Belmont in Portland. Some people rented stalls and others, like us, would just drive their truck into this huge garage and the buyers would come by and order what they wanted off the truck. Lloyd sold sweet corn for awhile and I went along with him a few times. He didn't continue this venture for long because it was not compatible with milking cows.

Some people took their produce to the Farmers Market in downtown south west Portland on 2nd, 3rd, and 4th streets in open market stalls. They would sell to the public all day. Before 1938, local farmers transported their wares of green house tomatoes, cucumbers, flowers, eggs, and chickens and who knows what else, even passengers. We don't know if the passengers and cargo rode in the same car or different cars. All this had stopped by the time we moved here.

THRESHING

The grain was cut with a binder, which was a machine pulled by horses. The cut grain was made into bundles that were tied in the middle with twine and dropped on the ground. The next activity was standing up the bundles in shocks. Several stood together like a teepee.

When it was time to haul the bundles, someone would walk along side the flat bed wagon, which was pulled by horses. They would pick up each bundle with a pitch fork and gently toss them onto the wagon and another person stacked them several feet high. They were hauled to a designated place where the thresher would be located and stacked again in circles several feet around and several feet high.

When the threshing machine was brought in, it was set up with the thresher and a steam engine or tractor. There was a long, wide belt hooked up between them. The tractor propelled the threshing machine. Tarps were put down on the ground to catch any loose grain. Bundles of grain were tossed into the thresher, shaking out the seeds and the straw. The straw was blown out the end of the thresher to make a straw pile for the protection and feed for the animals for the winter months.

The grain came out another spout to fill sacks and another man sat on two grain-filled sacks for a stool. He was the sack sewer. He used a precut piece of linen string and a sack needle to sew up the sacks and with a backward jerk of the needle, he would cut the string.

Another man would carry the sack 30 or 40 feet and stack them six feet high. Someone else hauled them to the barn. Today all this is done with one machine, an air conditioned combine!

Fixing dinner for the threshing crew – In years before refrigeration, food was a challenge. Mother said that when we lived in St. Paul, there was a fellow that would go from farm to farm selling fresh meats from a little truck.

This is what Mother would prepare for the threshing crew: roast beef or pork, chicken, mashed potatoes, gravy, corn on the cob, green beans, potato salad, sliced tomatoes and cucumbers, home made bread or biscuits, jam and for dessert – pies, including lemon meringue, apple and berry, plus milk, coffee and iced tea. Lemonade was taken to the men in mid-morning and mid-afternoon. That was my job.

Before dinner, the men would come in from the field and wash up. We had a mirror hung on the cherry tree. There was a bench with an enamel wash basin, a bar of soap, buckets of warm water and a dipper cup. A towel hung on the tree with a piece of binder twine. No nails were put in the tree. There was also a wide tooth comb for combing hair.

Dinner was usually served in the house, with a short rest after dinner before going back to work.

LOCKERS IN TUALATIN

It was great when the freezer lockers came to Tualatin. Mr. Huckhurst also had a slaughter house, so we no longer had to butcher at home. We rented a locker and froze our meat, plus we had frozen peaches, berries, green peas, creamed corn, etc.

Farms started disappearing in the '60's to housing and industrial developments. There are very few farms left and they have been pushed into retail, U-Pick type markets, plus raising hay, grain, and seed crops on many rented parcels of land. Now Oregon's biggest and fastest growing commodity is nursery stock.

Thank you! The end.