



ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM
INTERVIEW ABSTRACT

CONSULTANT: Dudley Price

DATE OF BIRTH: November 27, 1931 SEX: Male

DATE OF INTERVIEW: September 27, 1996

LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: Price residence, Albuquerque, NM

INTERVIEWER: Jane O'Cain

SOURCE OF INTERVIEW: NMF&RHM X OTHER _____

TRANSCRIBED: Yes: June 1997

NUMBER OF TAPES: Two

ABTRACTOR: Jane O'Cain

DATE ABSTRACTED: November 30, 2000

QUALITY OF RECORDING (SPECIFY): Very good.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE: Details history of the Price family in the dairy business (beef cattle, farming) in West Texas and New Mexico. Also discusses the founding of the New Mexico Farm & Ranch Heritage Museum [NMF&RHM].

DATE RANGE: 1916-1996

ABSTRACT (IMPORTANT TOPICS IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE):

TAPE ONE, SIDE A:

Dudley Price was born in El Paso, Texas, on November 27, 1931. His grandparents moved to the El Paso area from Ohio in 1905. They started with a single cow, but eventually his father purchased a dairy in Anthony, New Mexico, in 1916 or 1917. He processed milk there as well as milked cows. Later the Prices purchased the El Paso Dairy Company in El Paso and Price's father assumed leadership in the family business. (He was the second son out of four sons.) He merged the businesses into Creameries of America, who operated milk-processing plants across the Western United States. The new corporate entity was Price's Producers and they purchased Matthew's Dairy in Albuquerque in 1932 and renamed it Valley Gold Dairies. The investors were primarily family members, although one investor was Conrad Hilton.

After World War II, there was a severe milk shortage, and Valley Gold purchased another dairy in the Albuquerque area. Eventually they expanded to sixteen hundred dairy cows.

When Price's father retired, his brother was made president of the El Paso Price's Producers operation and Price was the executive vice president. Price was president of Price's Valley Gold Dairies, and his brother served as his executive vice president. In 1974 Price's brother died, and Price assumed control of both organizations. He operated both of them for three or four years when the family decided to sell the dairy processing operations. (In the early 1950s Creameries of America merged with Beatrice Foods. When the Federal Trade Commission ordered Beatrice Foods to divest some of their holdings, some of Price's El Paso and Roswell interests were impacted by this order, but the Price family managed to buy out their interest in the Valley Gold operation.) Dean Food of Chicago, Illinois, bought some of their operation, and Bordens bought their Albuquerque processing plants.

Price discusses changes in the dairying industry, "twenty years ago we were probably in the top ten in size of cow-milking families. Today I doubt we'd be in the top two or three hundred." He states that the "economical minimum size" continues to increase and is now a "two-thousand-cow milking herd."

He describes the impact on the New Mexico dairy industry when dairymen from California established dairies here. The largest dairy in the state milks eight thousand cows. The Prices milk 6200-6300 cows in four production units.

Price has been very involved in a New Mexico dairy co-operative whose goal is to stabilize retail milk prices. In the southern region of the Associated Milk Producers, New Mexico had four representatives out of thirty-six, and New Mexico was producing "almost half" of the milk in the region.

He states that it was always understood in his family that the children would continue in the dairy business. He remembers challenging his father on one occasion. "I decided (laughs) that was a mistake." His brother studied "cows" at university while Dudley attended Texas Tech University in Lubbock, Texas, and studied food technology. The next generation in the family has not continued in the dairy business.

TAPE ONE, SIDE B:

Price worked in the dairy business since he was a child. He dipped ice cream cones in their retail store in El Paso, helped build a new barn, weighed and tested milk, and did general work in the plant. Price worked to earn spending money. His sister, Barbara, did not go into the dairy business.

He discusses the promotional campaigns for the dairy industry, and the impact that medical research can have: “[some of the findings] just knocked . . . the legs out from under the, ah, cattle and dairy business.” On the other hand, economic downturns can have a positive effect on the industry, when people can’t afford much more than to go out for ice cream.

Although the Prices raised Guernsey cows at one time, their herds are now comprised of Holstein cows. The chief reason for this is the pricing formulas established by the Department of Agriculture.

For a period of time Price’s father ran a certified milk operation under the supervision of the medical milk commission. Usually, certified milk has much higher standards for bacteria count. As a part of their certified operation, the Prices also sold goat milk. Goat milk was sold to people with allergies to cows’ milk, usually babies in their first six to eight months of life. Price shut down their goat operation because of declining demand with the advent of soy milk.

Price discusses lactose intolerance and milk additives. He also discusses the need to re-establish intestinal flora after taking antibiotics.

When he started into the dairy business in Albuquerque after college, he “worked . . . [his] way up through the plant.” Price believes that it was a way to prove himself and to “know all the business.” His children did not follow him into the dairy business. However, one who is in real estate in Albuquerque is developing the land where the two Prices dairies were formerly located. The Prices moved their dairy operations to Willard, where they will be leased by longtime Price managers.

Price discusses changes in the dairy industry, for example, the discontinuance of home-delivered milk. Another major change relates to the change in milk production per cow from thirty-three pounds per day in the late 1950s to a high of eighty pounds per cow today. He states the average is close to sixty-eight or sixty-nine pounds per day. This change is related to changes in feed and the addition of “macro minerals” and “bypass proteins.” The amount each cow is fed is based on their production; nutritionists control the feed rations. Even the breeding program is dictated by a computer program that will breed for “more protein . . . better looks . . . less production or more . . . [or] higher fat.” Specialists in the industry include not only nutritionists but veterinarians who are dairy cow specialists. Price states, “New Mexico has the highest quality milk anywhere in the country.”

The consultant states that “history is important, as people tend to forget. He decided to contribute money to the NMF&RHM because getting funding “from the legislature is worse than trying to pull teeth.”

TAPE TWO, SIDE A:

Price first learned about the idea to build a farm and ranch museum from Dr. Bill Stephens, who brought a “professional fund raiser” to visit with him.

He discusses New Mexico’s relatively new prominence as a dairy producing state. Competition is keen in the state because all the dairies were recently built. New Mexico also has the lowest milk support prices in the United States. The expansion of dairying in New Mexico comes as a result of changing environmental laws and urban expansion in California.

Price is concerned that agricultural heritage is being lost. His work on the foundation board has been fund raising in the Albuquerque area. It was a difficult time to raise money in the dairy industry because they were experiencing very depressed prices. In fact, during the 1980s the government sponsored a dairy buyout, the purpose of which was to take dairy cattle were taken out of production. The buyout had an adverse impact on the beef cattle market; consequently it “wasn’t the time for dairymen to be . . . trying to talk to beef ranchers . . . to raise money.”

He made a contribution to the NMF&RHM in part to encourage other people to contribute money. Price states that he did not have strong feelings either way about the decision to place the NMF&RHM under the auspices of the State of New Mexico Office of Cultural Affairs; although he believes the Department of Agriculture might have been a “more understanding department.”

Price discusses again the importance of preserving “historical data” for the future. He believes that it is important to attract “young people” to a museum. He then discusses his observations about the school children that visit the dairy, and some who come to watch calves being born.

Price believes that it is important to tap the El Paso Area in order to get a sufficient population base of museum visitors.

TAPE TWO, SIDE B: Blank