



2-7-99

From MOO to YOU

*Claravale Dairy does things
the old-fashioned way*

IT'S 4 A.M. AND it's dark and cold outside. The cows are standing at the gate ready for milking. Steam rises from their bodies and the bell on the lead cow tinkles as dairy owner Ron Garthwaite opens the gate and follows the herd of Jerseys into the milking parlor. The cows clearly know the routine; they file in and take their places at the milking machines, munching grain while they wait.

"They're normally calm and patient," Garthwaite says. "But when you're late, they get mad."

Garthwaite's Claravale Farm herd gets milked twice a day, roughly every 12 hours, at 4 a.m. and 4 p.m. In between, the animals live the lives of contented cows; they eat alfalfa and lie down on the ground and rest.

"Cows that lie down produce more milk," Garthwaite says. Happy, contented cows are better producers.

Claravale Farm is unique because, as it says on the bottle, the dairy treats its cows with kindness and respect. Also, in an era of mass-produced milk, Claravale sells milk in its natural "raw" state. The milk is not homogenized, standardized, fortified or pasteurized. The milk cows are not given bovine growth hormone, antibiotics or ex-

posed to pesticides.

Claravale is one of only two dairies in the state that sells raw cow's milk.

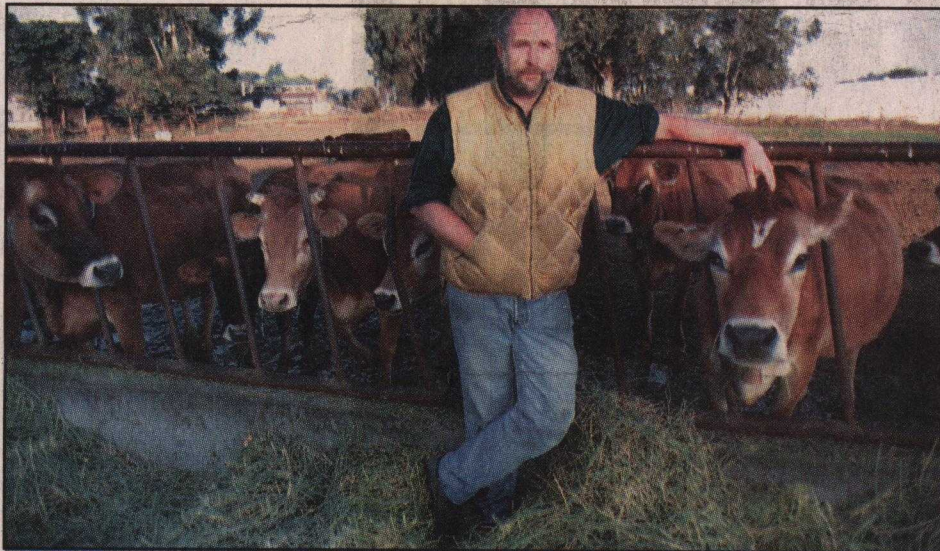
"Our milk goes from the cow, to the bottle, to you," Garthwaite says. "We produce high quality milk the simple, old-fashioned, natural way." Claravale's milk is bottled in quart glass bottles and sold in health food stores in Santa Cruz, the Bay Area, Sacramento, San Francisco and Los Angeles.

Garthwaite bought the dairy from Kenneth Peake of Monte Sereno and moved to Santa Cruz County last June. Peake, 92, had operated the dairy since 1927.

After searching throughout the county, Garthwaite purchased 11 acres off Green Valley Road in Watsonville, where he lives with his wife, Collette. He has long range plans to move the cows to this rural land, but initially, he had a delay in getting a dairy permit.

"We got positive feedback at the public hearing, not a dissenting vote. It was a lovefest, then all of a sudden, the county decided the septic system needed upgrading."

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Above: Ron Garthwaite switched to Jersey cows for better milk.

Left: Claravale milk is still delivered in glass bottles.

Far left: Earl Mathis makes sure every bottle is filled just right.

Claravale

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Although Garthwaite now has his dairy permit, the delay ate up money set aside to build a new milking parlor and barn.

Meanwhile, Claravale leases space from the Monterey Bay Academy in La Selva Beach. The coed high school run by Seventh Day Adventists had operated a dairy since the 1950's, but they closed it a year ago because the dairy was losing money, said a school spokesman.

Garthwaite employs students at the academy and hopes to continue Claravale's tradition of giving tours to schoolchildren. "Education will be a major part of the dairy," he says. "We want to show kids that milk doesn't come from the supermarket."

Claravale is clearly different from large, mass-production dairies. It's

the bad.

Claravale's herd now stands at 33 cows and one young bull. Garthwaite, a tall, thoughtful man in knee-high rubber boots, has christened each of his cows with modern-day names such as Stella and Collette. There's not a Buttercup in the bunch.

Garthwaite has a Ph.D. in biology and did genetic research at UC Santa Cruz and California Academy of Science. He seems an unlikely choice for his current occupation, which requires getting out of bed hours before daybreak. His interest in the history of dairy farming was sparked by Wilder Ranch State Park, a turn-of-the-century dairy farm outside of Santa Cruz.

He and a friend, who worked at Wilder Ranch as an interpreter, bought some cows, bred them and milked them at the ranch. "So that's

"When I bought the dairy, the goal was to continue to supply real milk," Garthwaite says. "We don't want to follow the trend in the dairy industry and make a processed food.

"The market's there," he says. "Santa Cruz has a big awareness and a lot of natural food stores, but the population is so small, it is not our major market. The Bay Area has less awareness, but it is a bigger market." A quart of raw milk costs \$1.50 when purchased at the dairy; about twice that in stores.

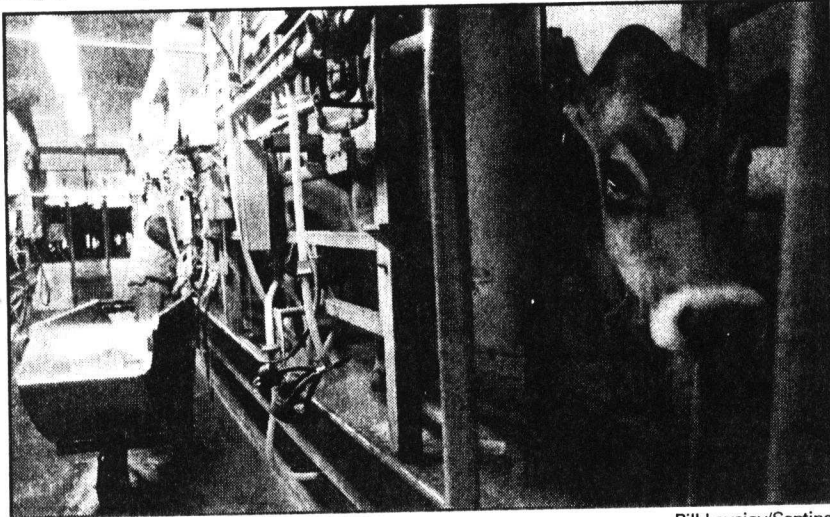
Garthwaite has switched the herd from Peake's brown and white Guernseys to Jerseys, soft-colored tan, cream, brown and black cows, with intelligent-looking faces and big, velvety eyes. The Jerseys are smarter and better milk cows, he says.

Garthwaite is proud of being an old-fashioned dairy farmer. "Until the 50s small dairies were everywhere; every community had a dairy, but gradually they got bought up and incorporated into large dairies," Garthwaite explains. "In the 60's factories were good and stainless steel milk plants were good. That's when those small dairies went out of business."

But now the climate has changed, Garthwaite thinks. "Now, things have turned around and people want local, natural products."

His customers are concerned about health and the environment, he says. "With a lot of our customers, it's not so much what's good for them. They're more concerned about what's good for the environment and the cows. It's not good for the cows to pump them up with hormones, milk them for a year or two and then send them off to slaughter. That's something that our customers don't want to buy into."

Claravale is one of two dairies producing of raw cow's milk in California. The other is Stueve's Dairy in Chino. There are four raw milk goat dairies. The state legislature permits raw milk, with routine pathogen testing, according to Richard Tate, chief of the milk and dairy food section of the California Dept. of Agriculture. However, the sale of raw milk for human consumption in interstate commerce is banned by the U. S. Food and Drug administration, Tate said.



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Dairy's motto: contented cows bring contented customers.

run the same way dairies were at the turn of the century. "Whatever comes out of the cow, we put in the bottle and that's it," Garthwaite says.

But doing it the natural way is harder, Garthwaite says. "It's like it's easier to sell canned tomatoes than fresh tomatoes. It's easier to sell processed milk than it is to sell real milk. It's more convenient and cheaper. Other dairies standardize the milk. They take out the butterfat, dehydrate it and then mix the butterfat with water. It's a manufactured process."

Regarding pasteurization, a heating process that kills germs in milk, Garthwaite says big dairies must pasteurize because their milk is contaminated with urine and manure. "They don't even wash the cows," he says. "They just spray them with disinfectant." By contrast, he says Claravale's cows are carefully cleaned.

Advocates of raw milk point out that pasteurization "cooks" milk, reducing the effectiveness of protein and calcium and the process kills "good" micro-organisms along with

how I learned to take care of cows," he says.

Then someone told him about Kenneth Peake, who was operating an old-fashioned dairy in Monte Sereno, a holdover from the 1920's. Peake's devoted customers would show up at the dairy to buy milk in antique glass bottles.

"Some days, he had no place to put the milk because people would keep the bottles," Garthwaite says.

"As big companies moved into the milk business, small dairies got swallowed up," Garthwaite says. "But Peake, who started milking cows at 18, continued to operate because he sold off his land a little at a time. When everybody else was going broke, he was losing money too, but it didn't matter because the value of his land had risen sharply and he could sell off pieces to keep going."

Garthwaite worked with Peake as a volunteer, then as a milker for about a year before he bought the dairy. There was a brief attempt to keep the dairy in Monte Sereno, but citizens were not able to raise some \$2 million to buy the land.