

Editorial : where to for the Swiss dairy farmer...?

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EDITORIAL

Where to for the Swiss dairy farmer...?

During our recent visit to the 'old country', it became inevitable that I should compare our New Zealand dairy farming fortunes with those of Switzerland's dairy farmers.

A late night television documentary ("*Spuren der Zeit*" - *Legacies of times past*) screened by SF1 (*Schweizer Fernsehen 1*) provided a 'golden opportunity' to do so. I found this production well in accord with discussions I was fortunate to have had with dairy farming families we had visited. The documentary showed pictures and gave commentaries by experts dealing with aspects of Swiss farming, mainly milk production, over the past century. Times of so-called progress in the mechanisation of agriculture through the introduction of the tractor, me-

chanical harvesting machinery and the introduction of the milking machine were documented. I especially recall the cynical expression (about the negative side of progress) by one of the members of the panel discussion group that followed the screening, as he remarked that milking cows in Switzerland would still be profitable if the milking machine had never been invented.

This remark bears some truth (as I understand it), since the Swiss dairy farmers' subsidies have been shifted from 'produce subsidies', sustaining a high return for milk delivered by the farmer, to 'subsidies per hectare of land'. The Swiss dairy farmer (down to the smallest land owner) has until recent years improved his breed of cows by introducing new blood, such as Swiss Brown, Friesian, and now even Jersey. Now it is sad to find many Swiss dairy farmers questioning their "**purpose**

of being"; looking for direction and not finding it; receiving huge subsidies and loathing the regulations and restrictions imposed on their farming operation; and open to the snide remarks handed out by a reluctant Swiss tax payer, only too well aware of the farmer's subsidies having such a bearing on high taxes.

Whenever I expressed some sympathy for the plight of today's Swiss dairy farmer (coming from a mountain dairy farming family myself), I received a cynical laugh from most of my non-farming friends.

However, nobody seemed prepared to indicate how the small Swiss dairy farmer is supposed to compete against the average EU dairy farmer, except with the radical solution that they should amalgamate to create EU-sized dairy farms.

Recognising the antipathy of the non-farming Swiss tax payer, the traditional Swiss dairy farmer is trying to win favour by inviting the village people, or city population, at specific times to a 'farmer's breakfast on the farm' (Buurezmorge auf dem Bauernhof), or by offering cheap 'holidays on the farm'. Traditional farming exhibitions, like the OLMA (Ostschweizerische Landwirtschaftliche Ausstellung), are used to increase understanding of the plight of the small-scale Swiss dairy farmer.

Despite all of this, the purpose of milking cows in Switzerland seems lost and the prospect of eventually competing with EU milk returns is an impossible expectation...

The Swiss dairy farmer points out the importance his forebears played during World War 2 in feeding the country's population of that time...! He also points out how important his 'contribution of today' is, by keeping the countryside clean and green for the benefit of the tourist industry, and as you may already know, just about every square meter of land in our 'old country' is beautifully kept, even the non-productive parts!

Just as the Kiwi dairy farmer has experienced, so the Swiss dairy farmer recognises that subsidies are for most of his kind like shackles on his farming operation. He knows that in due time, subsidies (SFR1,500 per month per labour unit, according to statistics) will be further reduced, in order to resemble the ones found in EU states. The result is that milk production, pushed to extremes a few years ago, is now discouraged

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and has in many instances already been replaced by a "nurse-cow regime" (**Ammen-Kuh-Haltung**), producing meat (veal) only. And the height of the irony is that some Swiss dairy farmers (of traditional stock) have to *buy* their milk for home consumption!

Swiss shop prices for most dairy products, I understand, are still well above EU shop prices, and most people living near Switzerland's borders cross regularly into 'foreign lands' to purchase their daily needs of such products.

Cynical Swiss people are making fun of the situation, and are trying to belittle their farmers' problems by pointing out that farmers have traditionally been bemoaning their plight since 'time immemorial'. The following new joke is currently making the rounds: *New regulations for Swiss dairy farmers announce a two month training course for all...during the first month they will be trained to improve their ability to fill in forms for subsidies, and in the second month all Swiss dairy farmers will visit the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem in order to improve their 'moaning abilities' !!*

So you can understand that besides a lot of Swiss chocolate, we returned to New Zealand from our Swiss trip with lots of 'food for thought', especially as one of my Swiss mountain-farmer friends remarked that *his* plight is all due to the overproduction created by America, Canada, Australia and New Zealand....!

How would you have answered him in my position ??



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Cultural Exhibitions and Festivals from Switzerland

(As advised by the Swiss Embassy)

Why make Prints ? This Exhibition shows the development of printmaking in Switzerland, since 1960, in over 70 works by 51 artists. The works document developments from screenprinting, to the experimental woodcut, engraving, lithography and, finally, the involvement of the computer. (See also *July / August Helvetia*)

Auckland	25 October - 17 November 2000 at University of Technology and University of Auckland, Fine Arts and Architecture Departments, 22 Symonds Street, Auckland.
Nelson	3 February - 4 March 2001 at The Bishop Suter Art Gallery, 208 Bridge Street, Nelson
Timaru	23 March - 29 April 2001 at Aigantighe Art Gallery, 49 Wai-iti Road, Timaru
Dunedin	14 May - 24 June 2001 at Otago Museum, 419 Great King Street, Dunedin

Festival of Europe - From 1-7 November, the **Bazin Streichquartett** from Switzerland will be in New Zealand for the **Festival of Europe** in Auckland, and also to perform in other main centres. Concert details will be advised by the Embassy and published in the *Helvetia* when known. If members of the quartett can be billeted by members of the Swiss Community in Auckland and other centres, please contact the Swiss Honorary Consul, Peter Deutsche, (09) 366 0404. For other centres, contact the Embassy directly - Mrs Louise Beale, (04) 472 1593.

A **Festival of Europe** will be running in Auckland from 27 October - 18 November. This will focus on trade conducted between New Zealand and the European Union and its neighbouring countries. The **'Best of Europe'** will be exposed promoting Europe's key features of products, services, culture, and foods and beverages, with the aim of increasing awareness and interest in Greater Europe, as well as providing participating countries with bilateral trade opportunities and the opportunity to increase sales as a result of the Festival's marketing exposure.

Switzerland's contributions will be with the **Why Make Prints?** exhibition (details above); participating in both a seminar on Tourism and in a trade-related Catalogue Show; performance by a yodelling group; and showing of the Swiss film **Fourbi** in the European Film Festival at Village Cinemas. The dates for the film showings have not been completely finalised (at time of writing, early October) but are provisionally scheduled for 1st and 8th November.

The **Festival** will provide Aucklanders and visitors with a virtual "window on Europe". The Embassy greatly appreciates the co-operation of the Swiss Community.

President's Message

A few months ago, I was very anxious at the prospect of our Editor going overseas for ten weeks, being left with the task of compiling three *Helvetia* issues. Well, this is my third and last - and I am quite happy to hand the job back to Rinaldo! Thankfully, there were no major problems, although one particular 'faux pas' with last month's issue did have me worried. For some reason, on the front cover, I wrote November, when it was, of course, only October - perhaps it was in the hope that my E.E. ("Editing Experience") would come to an earlier end!! By the time I'd noticed what I'd done, the magazine had already been printed, leaving me wondering what I'd call the 'real' November issue - "Volume Two", perhaps? Now imagine my surprise when I saw the finished product on the morning of packing - the month on the front cover actually *did* read October.

To my great relief, someone at Rosetown Print noticed the mistake and corrected it for me - so it did become the October issue afterall !

The latest Newsletter from the Swiss Abroad Association arrived recently, and it is once again offering new Youth Holiday Programmes, entitled "Discovering Switzerland". The Winter programme includes skiing and snowboarding camps; language courses; visits to businesses; 'home-stays' with Swiss families; and educational seminars. All activities are designed for young Swiss, aged 15 - 35, living abroad, to provide contact with local young Swiss compatriots. For anyone interest, just contact me for further information.

Once again, I'd like to encourage members to visit the cultural events happening around the country, both in conjunction with the Embassy, as well as the Christchurch Club (pg 9). Have a good month everyone, with kind regards to all
Beatrice