

The Cinderella of the cattle industry: the state and settler commercial dairy farming in Southern Rhodesia, c.1908 to 1937*

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Abstract

Anxious to diversify the economy towards white agriculture and to market the young colony as an attractive destination for prospective white immigrants, the British South Africa Company-run government presented Southern Rhodesia as a cattle-man's country. Dairy farming, it announced, would form an important adjunct to the colonial economy and play a vital role in its larger imperial ambitions. This article explores the development of commercial dairying in Southern Rhodesia from the announcement of the White Agricultural Policy in 1908 to the passage of the Dairy Act in 1937. Despite state propaganda, we demonstrate that the dairy industry did not develop along professional lines during this period due to a suite of environmental, financial and technical factors. Instead, it grew mainly as an *ad hoc* industry resorted to out of desperation. Although Southern Rhodesia had begun to participate actively in the external butter markets by the mid-1920s, we argue that this should not be construed to mean the dairy industry had come of age, but was merely a reflection of developments in the beef industry and the limited market for dairy products locally.

In 1911, Dr Eric Nobbs, the Southern Rhodesian Director of Agriculture asserted that the colony was most suited to a livestock-based economy, and that the cattle industry would drive the fledgling colonial economy.¹ As late as 1928, Thomas Hamilton, the state-appointed Dairy Expert, declared that dairy farming was of great national importance not only in ensuring food self-sufficiency but that its success would be 'key' to the success of the white immigration and land settlement policy of the young colony.² Within the context of such bold pronouncements, this article examines the development of dairy farming in Southern Rhodesia during the interwar period. It explores colonial state efforts to lay the foundation of a dairy industry. It traces the environmental, financial and technical challenges that rendered such efforts futile by the 1930s. Despite the colonial state rhetoric, we demonstrate that dairy farming was the orphaned step-child of the livestock industry, growing only as a side-line activity to beef production.

* The country once called 'Southern Rhodesia' was renamed 'Zimbabwe' upon the attainment of majority rule in 1980. However, the authors have chosen to adopt contemporary usage in this paper.

¹ *Report of the Director of Agriculture, 1911*, p. 4.

S1193, D1/2, Chief Dairy Officer, T. Hamilton to McDonald (designation not given), 19 July 1928.

² National Archives of Zimbabwe (hereafter NAZ),

As both the colonial administration and early settlers were initially preoccupied with gold mining, settler agriculture did not receive significant attention until the mid-1900s. We begin by briefly outlining the factors that led to the abandonment of the 'Second Rand' dream and the drive towards agriculture, which was encapsulated in the adoption of the White Agricultural Policy (WAP) in 1908. Noting the marginal position African dairy farming occupied in the colonial market owing to a policy that was designed to hinder indigenous enterprise, we demonstrate that settler dairy farming did not develop as the state had envisaged. This was because the industry was initially spurned by cattle owners who found it more profitable and less demanding to invest in beef than milk. Although, as evinced in this article, dairy production increased exponentially from the mid-1920s onwards, so much so that Southern Rhodesia developed an export market, we argue that this was not an indication that the industry had come of age, but was a mere consequence of problems in the beef industry and the small domestic market for dairy products.

This study draws from related colonial contexts in British settler colonies, the British metropole itself and relevant African case studies. It compares and contrasts developments with Marjorie Gilmore's study on the causes and effects of government policy on the initial development and establishment of agricultural industries, particularly the dairying, maize and tobacco sectors, in a similar colonial context in Australia.³ David Taylor's longitudinal studies of the evolution of the English dairy industry between 1860 and 1930 provide a detailed exposition of the structural changes that occurred in the home industry. In his first article, written in 1974, Taylor looked at the productivity and profit levels of dairy producers in the country, arguing that dairying was the 'laggard industry sector of English agriculture'.⁴ In a subsequent work, Taylor focused on the structural change from butter and cheese during the 1860s to the liquid milk trade that had begun to dominate the industry by the 1930s.⁵ This, he argued, was a result of the falling profitability of non-liquid dairy products. These works offer useful contextual comparisons to Zimbabwe's case, especially when one considers that the country was a latecomer to the industry.

Within the sub-regional context, Lilian Mafela's study on the development of dairy farming in colonial Botswana offers interesting comparisons. She demonstrates the manner in which the dairy industry was only considered as an important option after difficulties arose in the beef industry during the 1930s.⁶ Although the history of dairy farming in colonial Zimbabwe has yet to receive adequate attention, Jeft Ngadze's work on the development of commercial dairying during the first 60 years of colonialism offers a truncated, but nevertheless useful platform with which to begin an analysis of local production dynamics.⁷ Whereas the scope

³ M. A. Gilmore, 'Kill, cure or strangle: The history of government intervention in three key agricultural industries on the Atherton Tablelands, 1895–2005' (PhD Thesis, James Cook University, North Queensland, 2005).

⁴ D. Taylor, 'The English dairy industry, 1860–1930: The need for reassessment', *AgHR* 22 (1974), p. 158.

⁵ Id., 'Growth and Structural change in the English dairy industry, 1860–1930', *AgHR* 35, (1987), pp. 47–64. Also see D. Taylor, 'The English dairy industry,

1860–1930', *EcHR* 29 (1976), pp. 585–601.

⁶ L. Mafela, 'Colonial initiatives and African response in the establishment of the dairy industry in the Bechuanaland Protectorate, 1930–1966', *Botswana J. African Studies*, 13 (1999), pp. 77–91.

⁷ J. Ngadze, 'The development of commercial dairying from an international perspective: a case of a late-comer' (Honours dissertation, University of Zimbabwe, 1985).

of his work is limited to local and international marketing dynamics, and the impact of state intervention and legislation, the focus of this article is on the socio-economic and environmental imperatives that shaped the establishment of settler dairy farming in Southern Rhodesia. Drawing on primary sources (official annual reports and archival evidence) and secondary sources, this article seeks to fill a gaping lacuna in Southern Rhodesian agricultural historiography, which to date has evinced a bias towards the beef industry. Indeed, as we demonstrate in this article, the two industries shared a symbiotic, sympatric, but highly asymmetrical relationship, with the fortunes of one inevitably affecting the other.

I

When orchestrating the occupation of Southern Rhodesia in 1890, the BSAC, under the leadership of Cecil John Rhodes, was driven by the hopes of finding rich mineral deposits, especially gold, of the same magnitude as those found in South Africa. As Richard Hodder-Williams has shown, white settlement in Southern Rhodesia was originally fired not by any sense of imperial mission, but by the prospect of a 'Second Rand' developing out of the mineral concessions Rhodes had negotiated with Lobengula, the Paramount Chief of the Ndebele.⁸ The fabled 'Second Rand' would in turn generate new funds to finance further development. Rochford Maguire, one of the Company's directors, pithily captured the situation in 1891 thus: 'when cattle and gold were in competition, nobody thought of cattle.'⁹

Although considerable tracts of land were pegged and alienated by the British South Africa Company and sold to many companies and individual settlers at concessional rates, much of the land was retained for speculative purposes; buyers were only holding onto the land in the hope of selling it off when its value had gone up. There were very few settlers on the land, and, for many, farming 'meant only cutting down trees and selling the wood, or cultivating a small patch of mealies [maize]'.¹⁰ Thus, much of the land taken up for settler occupation in the first five years remained untilled. Indeed, this group of settlers have been described as merely 'store-keepers or small time prospectors' who, preoccupied with mining and speculative dealings, could not develop their land for commercial agricultural production.¹¹

By the turn of the century, however, questions had begun to arise concerning the materiality of the dream of the 'Second Rand'. Apart from overestimation of the colony's mineral wealth, the disturbances caused by the Ndebele uprising of 1893 and the ensuing war of dispossession diverted the BSAC'S attention from mining and agricultural development towards safeguarding its grip and control of the territory.¹² Exacerbating the situation was the Jameson Raid of 29 December 1895 to 2 January 1896 – a military onslaught on Paul Kruger's Transvaal Republic in

⁸ The British South Africa Company's obsession with the hopes of finding huge mineral wealth in Southern Rhodesia has been documented by many historians. For instance, see, R. Hodder-Williams, *White farmers in Rhodesia, 1890–1965* (1983), p. 13. G. Arrighi, *The political economy of Rhodesia* (1967), p. 35.

⁹ Rochford Maguire, quoted in R. Palmer, *Land and racial domination in Rhodesia* (1977), p. 26.

¹⁰ I. Phimister, *An economic and social history of Zimbabwe. Capital accumulation and class struggle* (1988), p. 58.

¹¹ Hodder-Williams, *White farmers*, pp. 24, 25.

¹² S. J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 'Rethinking the colonial encounter in Zimbabwe in the early twentieth century', *J. Southern African Studies* 33 (2007), p. 177.

South Africa led by Leander Starr Jameson, the Company administrator – which presented the Shona and Ndebele with an opportunity to launch their own rebellion against the BSAC at a time when Company troops were committed to fighting the Transvaal Republic.¹³ The net impact of the raid and the risings, which ended in October 1897, was that the colony's infant mining industry was left on the verge of collapse. The impact was felt on the London Stock exchange where share values of 22 Rhodesian mining companies plummeted between 1895 and 1898.¹⁴

These crises eroded the embryonic profitability of Rhodesian mining enterprises. Another collapse of the London market for the colony's mining shares in 1903 prompted the Company government not only to restructure the mining industry,¹⁵ but also to begin to look to settler agriculture as an economic alternative. The Company's Directors turned to the land which, it was widely believed, the Company could dispose of as it wished.¹⁶ From this period onwards, the BSAC began put more emphasis on promoting settler agriculture. Immigrants with money and skills were sought to develop the land and thus enhance the value of unsold land owned by the Company.

A Land Settlement Committee was established in London in 1905 and Charles D. Wise was appointed Director of Land Settlement in Southern Rhodesia. Already an experienced British agriculturalist, Wise arrived in Southern Rhodesia in October 1905, with instructions from the board 'to report upon current and future prospects of the agricultural industry, the opportunities for new settlers, and the methods by which cultivating owners could best be established upon the soil'. The following year, Wise wrote a glowing report describing the country's agricultural potential, particularly in cattle raising, maize and tobacco production. He recommended that it should be the aim of the BSAC to dispose of its land at low rates in order to encourage settler immigration, and should be prepared to 'assist these men as far as possible within reason, without spoon-feeding and make them successful as their success will mean the success of land settlement and the development of the country'.¹⁷

A commission of Directors of the BSAC visited the country in 1907, and confirmed Wise's recommendations. The commission insisted that the aim of the Company was to 'stimulate in every possible way the opening up and steady development of the mineral and agricultural resources of the country'.¹⁸ The new emphasis on promoting settler agriculture found its strongest expression through the reorganization of the Agricultural Department in 1908 under the directorship of Dr Eric Nobbs, an agricultural scientist who had been an agricultural assistant in the Cape Department of Agriculture.¹⁹ His efforts revolutionized the Department, as agriculture began to take a leading role in the development of Rhodesia's fledgling economy.

The BSAC recognized that a number of specialists in various scientific disciplines were required to give advice to incoming settlers and 'to conduct research on all the problems which

¹³ G. Blainey, 'Lost causes of the Jameson Raid', *EcHR* 18 (1965), pp. 350–66. For a wider discussion of the Jameson Raid, see T. O. Ranger, *Revolt in Southern Rhodesia, 1896–97: a study in African Resistance* (1967), p. 5.

¹⁴ I. Phimister, 'The reconstruction of the Southern Rhodesian gold mining industry', *EcHR* 29 (1976), p. 466.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 465–8.

¹⁶ Hodder-Williams, *White Farmers*, p. 120.

¹⁷ Charles D. Wise, *British South Africa Company Report on Land Settlement* (1906).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*,

¹⁹ E. A. Nobbs, 'The native cattle of Southern Rhodesia', *South African J. Science* 24 (1927), p. 1.

had to be solved to put agriculture in a new country and environment on a sound basis'.²⁰ To this end various appointments were made, including an entomologist, a tobacco expert and the Chief of the Animals Branch, under which dairy farming fell.²¹ The first Dairy Expert, J. B. Fisher, was appointed in 1918 and was replaced by Thomas Hamilton the following year. State annual expenditure on agriculture in general increased from £8729 in 1904 to £41,168 by 1923.²² The staff of the Agricultural Department were mandated to conduct experiments and disseminate information to farmers. They regularly visited farms to give on-the-spot advice to settler farmers. These visits, according to Nobbs, were effective in the provision of support and guidance to farmers in a country 'with a population so largely composed of newcomers, many of them without any agricultural experience'.²³

II

Besides the provision of technical and financial assistance to white farmers, the success of settler agriculture also depended on the availability of cheap African labour. Yet, as Robin Palmer and Ian Phimister have demonstrated, African agriculture had generally been prosperous during the first two decades as a result of the settler fixation with mining, and the emergence of new markets on mining and emerging urban settlements.²⁴ Indeed, for as long as African agriculturalists continued to prosper, they naturally remained reluctant to become wage labour on settler farms. The post-1908 period thus witnessed a systematic and intentional crushing of African agricultural enterprise. With regards to dairy farming, and the cattle industry in general, the decades following the adoption of WAP were followed by further weakening of African capacity to produce surplus milk and other dairy products for the market.

Although the African herd continued to increase, doubling from just under 200,000 in 1908 to over 400,000 by 1914, the position of African cattle owners became increasingly perilous from 1908 onwards.²⁵ As competition for grazing land between white-owned cattle and those belonging to Africans resident on European land increased, settlers brought pressure to bear on the colonial administration to revise the patterns of land ownership and utilization. This led to the passage of the Private Locations Ordinance in 1908, which, by discouraging white land-owners from leasing part of their land to Africans, was really an attempt to 'deny Africans the use of white owned land, except in the capacity as labourers'.²⁶ Although the Ordinance was not entirely successful in curbing land tenancy, it resulted in the movement of

²⁰ H. Weinmann, *Agricultural research and development in Southern Rhodesia under the rule of the British South Africa Company, 1890-1923* (1972), p. 3.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

²² *Official Year Book of the Colony of Southern Rhodesia, 1924*, p. 4.

²³ *Report of the Director of Agriculture, 1921*, p. 6.

²⁴ For a detailed discussion of African agricultural prosperity prior to 1908, see R. Palmer, 'The agricultural history of Rhodesia', in R. Palmer and N. Parsons (eds), *The roots of rural poverty in central and southern Africa* (1977), p. 250; Palmer, *Land and racial domination in*

Rhodesia, p. 71; and I. Phimister, 'Peasant production and underdevelopment in Southern Rhodesia, 1890-1914', *African Affairs*, 73 (1974), pp. 217-28.

²⁵ *Report of the Director of Agriculture, 1914*, p. 2.

²⁶ J. Rennie, 'White farmers, black tenants, and landlord legislation: Southern Rhodesia, 1890-1930', *J. Southern African Studies*, 5 (1978), p. 46. For a more detailed discussion of the Private Locations Ordinance, also see C. Youé, 'Black squatters on white farms: segregation and agrarian change in Kenya, South Africa, and Rhodesia, 1902-1963', *International Hist. Rev.* 24 (2002), pp. 558-602.

many Africans with their cattle onto reserves. Palmer states that most Africans in districts like Belingwe, Bubi, Bulawayo, Matobo and Umzingwane were moved from their land after 1908, and that between 50 and 100 per cent more people left European land between 1910 and 1911 than the official numbers show.²⁷

The imposition of rents on all Africans occupying unalienated land (land which remained under the control of the Company) was yet another step towards stifling African agrarian prosperity. It was another reason for the movement of many Africans off this land and into reserves. For instance, the Native Commissioner for Fort Victoria reported in 1910 that nearly all of Chief Bere's people had moved into reserves, totally depopulating the community under his jurisdiction.²⁸ The Chief Native Commissioner for Matabeleland reported that numerous Africans were complaining about having to pay so many fees and taxes, noting that he expected no less than 7400 people, together with some 11,000 head of cattle, to migrate into Belingwe, Gwaai, Lower Gwelo, Que Que, and Shangani reserves.²⁹

Although no laws were pronounced which specifically discriminated against Africans in the dairy market, there can be little doubt that the displacement of Africans and their livestock had a devastating effect on their capacity to produce and market dairy products. The reserves became notorious for their arid climate, poor soils and debilitating bovine diseases; most reserves were inhospitable for both humans and livestock.³⁰ If that were not enough, marketing of products on the official markets was made nearly impossible by the fact that when reconfiguring the reserves' boundaries after 1915, the Estates Department ensured that few reserves were located near the major railways and roads. Because milk is a highly perishable commodity which needs to be transported to the market almost immediately after production, few Africans were able to send milk to existing dairies. While official figures showing milk production and marketing figures in the reserves are scarce, an official of the Dairy Division remarked that very little milk was received from reserves during the 1930s. He added that as Africans and their stock were still attempting to adjust to life in the reserves, it was 'predictable that the primary concern of many would be to produce enough for family consumption, with whatever surplus left circulating within the community'.³¹

It should be noted, however, that a few Africans outside the reserves managed to participate in the official dairy market. Some, mostly of South African and Batswana origin, took advantage of the existence of a clause in the 1898 Southern Rhodesia Orders in Council which gave Africans the right 'to purchase land on the same conditions as whites'.³² The Basotho, who had settled in Victoria district, embarked on successful commercial dairy farming. Jacob Molebaleng and three others purchased Erichsthal Farm³³ in the Victoria District from the Posselt Family for £1000 in 1907 and immediately established thriving dairy enterprises.³⁴ Led

²⁷ Palmer, *Land and racial domination in Rhodesia*, p. 96.

²⁸ NAZ, L2/2/117/46, Native Commissioner, Victoria, to the Chief Native Commissioner, Mashonaland, 10 Dec. 1908.

²⁹ NAZ, LO 4/1/16, Report of the Chief Native Commissioner, Matabeleland for the year 1914.

³⁰ J. Alexander, J. McGregor and T. O. Ranger, *Violence*

and memory: One hundred years in the 'Dark Forests' of Matabeleland (2000), p. 23.

³¹ NAZ, Oral 217, John Richmond Cory, p. 8.

³² R. Blake, *A history of Rhodesia* (1977), p. 153.

³³ The farm was located between Shagashe and Mutirikwi Rivers in the Ndanga District.

³⁴ NAZ, AT1/2/1/10, 'Land owned by Natives in 1925'.

by Ephraim Morudu, another group of nine Basotho men bought Niekerk's Rust Farm, near the Harawe area in 1909, and administered it like a small cooperative dairy society, into which many other people subsequently joined.³⁵ As Joseph Mujere has shown, the Basotho on the two farms used their links to the Dutch Reformed Church missionaries to access education and resources which enabled them to produce milk and cream for the dairies and creameries in nearby Victoria and Gwelo.³⁶ What distinguished this group was that, unlike the majority of indigenous Africans, they had acquired considerable capital and education from their connections with the missionaries and evangelists of the Dutch Reformed Church.

The only report of indigenous Africans who also acquired land and built dairy infrastructure came from Rugby farm, which was owned by 21 Karanga men who had trained as teachers at the Dutch Reformed Church Mission at Morgenster. One of the part owners of the farm had accumulated a huge herd of cattle, and by 1920 had managed to purchase a cream separator, among other dairy utensils. By 1925, Rugby farm had become one of the key suppliers of milk and cream to the dairies in Victoria and Gwelo. With unambiguous racial bias, the Native Commissioner for Victoria in 1925 reported that, together with producers at Erichsthal and Niekerk farms, Rugby farm represented a breed of 'progressive' and 'intelligent natives' who, because of their level of education, ownership of property were supplying milk and cream to the Victoria Depot.³⁷ Overall though, only a handful of largely foreign-born Africans participated in the colonial dairy market during the 1920s and 1930s.

III

The Company's new focus on commercial agriculture was followed by concerted efforts aimed at injecting life into settler dairy farming, and the cattle industry more generally. Indeed, state propaganda from the late 1900s suggested that livestock production would be the lynchpin of settler agriculture. Nobbs maintained in 1909 that 'Essentially, Rhodesia is a stock country. It would be hard to over-emphasize the pre-eminent importance of the cattle industry as a branch of agriculture'.³⁸ In 1911 he asserted that:

Arable farming must rank below stock-farming in importance, profitable and useful as it is. Cattle raising requires more capital and a longer time before profits accrue, but ultimately yields a higher return, whilst crop growing yields a more regular and an earlier return – a more vital consideration to the newcomer and the man of limited means. Ranching, or at least cattle-farming on extensive lines, is a growing feature of the times, so far with a very promising measure of success, the one general want as yet being numbers.³⁹

The notion that Southern Rhodesia, particularly the south-western region of the country, was generally better suited to a pastoral economy than arable farming was derived from the belief that the country's topography, soils and climate were generally not suited to intensive arable

³⁵ J. Mujere, 'Autochthons, strangers, modernising educationists, and progressive farmers: Basotho struggles for belonging in Zimbabwe, 1930s–2008' (PhD Thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2012), p. 51.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

³⁷ NAZ, N9/1/17, Report of the Native Commissioner, Victoria District, 1924.

³⁸ *Report of the Director of Agriculture, 1909.*

³⁹ *Report of the Director of Agriculture, 1911.*

farming. With only about 40 per cent receiving an average annual rainfall of more than 28 inches, which is considered to be the minimum annual rainfall required for most of the staple grains, arable farming was a risky venture in most parts of the country.⁴⁰ Only the eastern parts of the country could sustain intensive crop production.⁴¹

Building on the country's perceived suitability for a cattle-based agricultural sector, colonial agricultural authorities sought to encourage white commercial dairying among incoming settlers for 'strategic' reasons. Indeed, dairy farming was earmarked to play a pivotal role in the larger colonial development scheme. As the Dairy Expert in the Agricultural Department, Thomas Hamilton (later the Chief Dairy Officer), wrote in 1928:

The dairy industry is of great national importance and ... on its success the success of land settlement in this colony largely depends. It is essentially a key industry ... [and] any scheme, therefore, which can be put forward to improve the status of the dairy industry should necessarily receive the support of the government.⁴²

Indeed, as was the case on Australia's Atherton Tablelands, colonial officials viewed dairying as 'key' to their stated goal of creating a white man's country in Southern Rhodesia. Gilmore has argued that the Australian state's active involvement in commercial dairying 'grew out of the necessity to populate the vast continent and to provide necessary infrastructure and services, and to protect the livelihoods of those who pioneered settlement'.⁴³ Further pushing the cause for the speedy establishment of a strong dairy industry was the amount of money that was expended on importing butter and cheese. R. J. Moore, a British expert, who was invited by the BSAC to give advice on agricultural matters in 1906, intimated that the country was wasting valuable financial resources – amounting to £20,000 yearly – on imported dairy products which could be produced locally.⁴⁴

Yet, despite propaganda by colonial authorities, much of Southern Rhodesia's environment was not suitable for intensive commercial dairying. Stanley Hyatt, a white transport rider during the early 1900s, bemoaning the small quantity of milk available on the milk market, observed that the 'Rhodesian veld does not seem to lend itself to the production of milk'.⁴⁵ Indeed, the country's climate did not compare favourably with the major dairy-producing countries in the world. Generally speaking, the minimum natural requirements for successful dairy farming are a fairly cool climate, well-pastured grasslands, and an average rainfall of at least 635mm (24 inches) per annum.⁴⁶ Southern Rhodesia had a highly seasonal and erratic rainfall pattern, with the average for over half of the country being less than 635mm per annum. As a result, the natural pasturage was inadequate for the maintenance of milk production for

⁴⁰ M. Yudelman, *Africans on the Land. Economic problems of African agricultural development in southern, central, and east Africa, with special reference to Southern Rhodesia* (1964), p. 10.

⁴¹ The eastern parts of Zimbabwe receive a higher average rainfall than the south-western part. Manicaland province in the eastern highlands receives an annual average of above 650mm, the southern provinces receive below 400mm per annum.

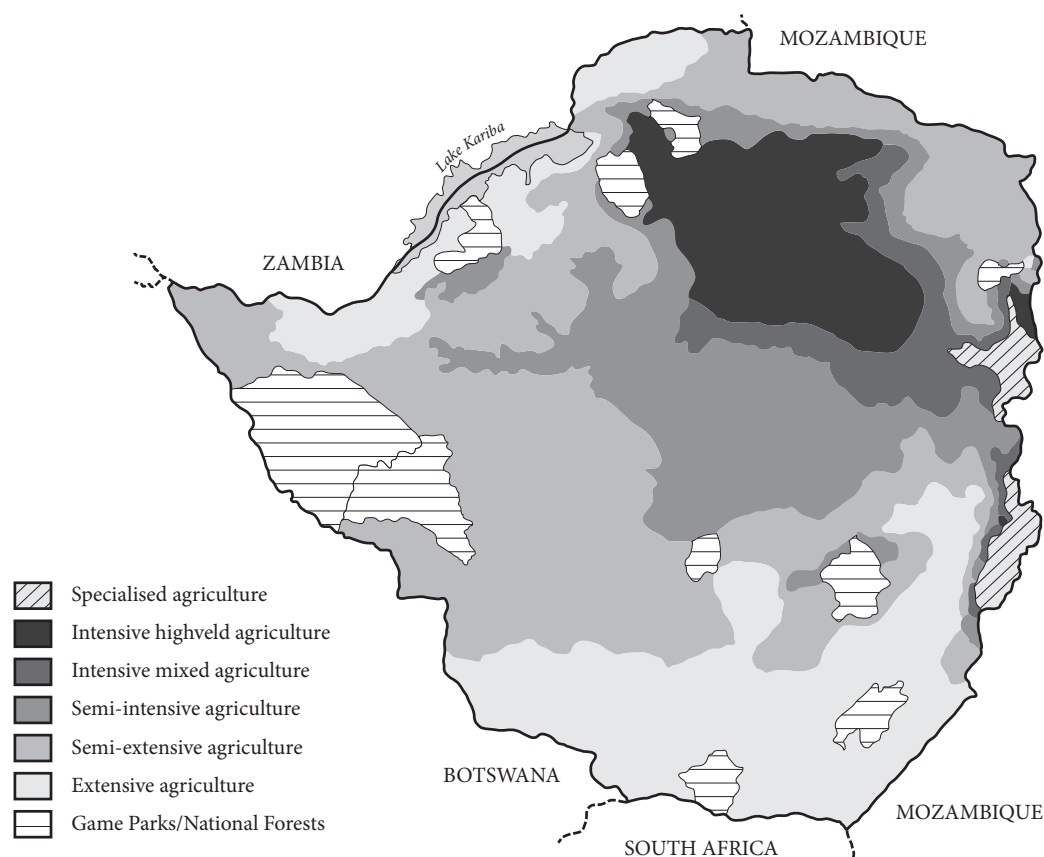
⁴² NAZ, S1193, D1/2, Chief Dairy Officer, T. Hamilton, to McDonald (designation not given), 19 July 1928.

⁴³ Gilmore, 'Kill, cure or strangle', p. 59.

⁴⁴ NAZ, G1/5/3, Report on visit to Rhodesia, for the Department of Agriculture, by R. J. Moore, Creamery Expert, to the Secretary for Agriculture, 11 July 1906.

⁴⁵ S. P. Hyatt, *The Old Transport Road* (1914).

⁴⁶ The Dairy Branch, 'The dairying industry', *Rhodesia Agricultural J.* 11 (1944), p. 79.



MAP 1: The natural farming regions of Southern Rhodesia.

Source: based on M. Yudelman, *Africans on the Land* (1964), p. 32.

more than half the year. Pasturage was available mainly between November and March, when the country received rains.⁴⁷ Map 1 which illustrates the country's ecological zones, shows that arable farming was clearly unviable owing to low rainfall (less than 28 inches annually) and poor soils in the south-western parts of the country, these areas could only sustain dairy industry with great difficulty and at considerable cost.

Southern Rhodesia's relatively difficult conditions can be understood by considering the fact that its maximum carrying capacity before 1950 was no more than one cow per two acres of land, while New Zealand's capacity stood at one cow per acre, and in some places reached two cows for three acres.⁴⁸ New Zealand, Canada and Denmark had lower average temperatures than Southern Rhodesia. The result of this was that Southern Rhodesian farmers required

⁴⁷ For more detailed description of the country's rainfall patterns and general topography in the 1920s, see E. J. Tawse, 'Southern Rhodesia: A white man's country in the tropics', *Geographical Rev*, 17 (1927),

pp. 89–106.

⁴⁸ *Report of the committee of enquiry into the economic development of the colony (Southern Rhodesia)*, 1939, p. 29.

supplementary feed for cattle during the dry months of the year, at a considerably higher cost, when their counterparts in other Commonwealth countries depended on natural pasturage for longer periods of the year.

In spite of these climatic challenges, the colonial government was determined to make the cattle industry in general, and dairy farming in particular, an important pillar of the colonial agrarian economy. Prior to the adoption of the WAP, only a handful of privately run creameries existed in the country, with the majority of cream and milk producers having opted to make butter on their own farms.⁴⁹ The first state-owned creamery was established in Gwelo in 1912. Given the central geographical location of Gwelo and its relative accessibility by farmers from nearly every district in the country, the creamery received milk cream from producers from both Matabeleland and Mashonaland provinces for the manufacture of butter and cheese. Payment to producers was based on the quality of the butter fat received, and the creamery employed a qualified man to undertake the grading. The butter fat was graded into four classes, each with its own price: first class, second class, third class and ungraded. Occasionally, the Dairy Expert would visit the creamery to test the cream and butter fat sent by farmers, as well as the quality of the butter and cheese manufactured at the creamery. The Rhodesia Stock Owners Association (Bulawayo) lauded the development as a major step forward in the development of an organized marketing system. Unlike the old system, the association noted that the system gave stock owners an opportunity of conducting the business on modern lines, producing the milk at distant points, separating on the farm and despatching the cream to a central factory, where it would be paid for on the basis of actual butter fat supplied.⁵⁰

The first official attempt to stimulate some interest in dairy farming among farmers in Southern Rhodesia took place in the 1910 when the BSAC arranged for Miss E. A. Maidment, a Dairy Instructress at Dushaw County Dairy School, in Yorkshire, to visit Rhodesia for a few months and to give a series of lectures and demonstrations at various centres, on milk production methods, milk testing, the manufacture of cheese and butter and so forth.⁵¹ In addition to individual farms, she visited 17 centres throughout the country and lectured and gave demonstrations to more than 570 farmers. Maidment observed that, while environmental limitations could be surmounted, as had happened in other countries like Argentina and Australia which had developed successful dairying industries in spite of adverse climatic conditions, the major hindrance to successful commercial dairying was that relatively more capital, infrastructure and expertise was required in the industry in comparison to other agricultural enterprises. Comparing dairy farming to beef production and the differences in the development of the two industries, Maidment explained:

The reason probably that up to the present dairying has not been more largely developed is that when people were settling, there was very little railway accommodation and also the knowledge of how to prepare milk for distribution in a sub-tropical climate was very little

⁴⁹ Among the privately run creameries were Devonshire and Café Creamery, Lal Bal Dairy and the Model Dairy in Bulawayo, the Gazaland Dairy in Chipinga and three others in Salisbury.

⁵⁰ NAZ, G1/5/3, Chairman of the Rhodesian

Landowners and Farmers Association (Bulawayo), to Eric A. Nobbs, Director of Agriculture, 13 Feb. 1913.

⁵¹ NAZ, S/ZIM 018; E. A. Maidment, 'Report of a tour in Rhodesia, 1910', *Rhodesia Agricultural J.* 8, (Mar. 1911), pp. 423–34.

understood. Further, dairying involves rather more capital, organisation, care and attention than the farmer is prepared for in the early days (the country is even still very young), and has to be content with cattle raising for beef and transport, maize growing, poultry keeping, and perhaps later, tobacco growing.⁵²

Maidment's statement that dairy farming requires more capital and organization is quite instructive. As milk is highly perishable, it poses serious handling challenges. First, as an excellent medium for bacterial growth, it should be cooled immediately after the milking process to temperatures below which bacteria can survive (below 10 degrees Celsius). Second, milk requires high-cost transportation, ideally daily, to markets or processing plants before it loses its keeping qualities. Third, and as a consequence of the first two factors, the handling and processing of milk requires trained and hygiene-conscious workers and relatively more sophisticated apparatus such as coolers, cans, and buckets.⁵³ Around the same time as Maidment was undertaking her tour, J. C. Coore, a dairy specialist in the Agricultural Department, noted that dairy farmers needed to erect more sophisticated and costly infrastructure in the way of milking sheds on their premises, purchase cooling machines and feed their stock during the dry winter months. He added that more expertise was required in the care and feeding of both the cow and the calf, the milking process and the handling of a highly perishable product.⁵⁴

Against this, it is important to remember that the majority of settlers during the 1910s and 1920s possessed neither the capital nor the expertise to embark successfully on capitalist agriculture in general, and much less in a highly specialized industry such as dairy farming. Machingaidze has demonstrated that despite the colonial government's earnest efforts to develop settler agriculture, lack of capital was one of the chief hindrances to its success.⁵⁵ With direct reference to the cattle industry, Samasuwo contended that 'the process of economic expansion in the cattle sector itself was hampered by severe under capitalisation on the part of most white ranchers'.⁵⁶ Although loans were available to prospective farmers through the Land and Agricultural Bank, itself a creation of the Responsible Government in 1924 after the dissolution of the Land Bank, the funds made available were often inadequate for the purchase of many bulls and cows. Reporting in 1930, Hamilton complained that most settlers lacked both capital and expertise. He added that most of the producers 'who are at present sending cream to the creameries were in such a straitened financial position' that they could not afford to purchase dairy stock or erect the necessary buildings.⁵⁷ Thus, it is not surprising

⁵² NAZ S/ZIM 018; E. A. Maidment, 'Report of a tour in Rhodesia, 1910', p. 424.

⁵³ H. Schelhaus, 'The dairy industry in a changing world', *Smallholder dairying in the tropics* (1999), pp. 1–2.

⁵⁴ J. C. Moore, 'Hints to dairy farmers', *Rhodesia Agricultural J.*, 9, (1911), p. 24. Among some of the things Moore mentioned was the ration of food containing the constituents necessary for the production of milk, as well as the heat and energy necessary for the production of milk, of which he said a 'great farmer' needed to develop an understanding.

⁵⁵ See V. Machingaidze, 'The development of settler capitalist agriculture in Southern Rhodesia with particular reference to the role of the state, 1908–1939' (PhD Thesis, University of London, 1980), p. 3.

⁵⁶ N. Samasuwo, "'There is something about cattle': Towards an economic history of the beef industry in colonial Zimbabwe, with special reference to the role of the state' (PhD Thesis, University of Cape Town, 2000), p. 20.

⁵⁷ NAZ, S1193, D1/2, T. Hamilton to C. K. Brain, Acting Secretary, Department of Agriculture, 7 Feb. 1930.

that, notwithstanding state rhetoric on the national importance of dairy farming, the majority of those who ventured into the cattle industry during the early years of settler occupation chose beef production as their main business, and produced cream, butter and milk only as a side-line activity in which they could not adequately invest. Indeed, although her visit was aimed at stimulating the dairy industry by encouraging settlers to take dairying seriously as a viable agricultural enterprise, Maidment's visit was fated to meet with limited results as long as farmers 'earned more money by engaging themselves in the less exacting branches of agriculture like cattle ranching, maize and tobacco growing'.⁵⁸

Nor did matters improve over time. John Richmond Cory, a man whose involvement in the dairy industry in Southern Rhodesia dated back to 1925, when he was engaged as an Assistant Dairy Expert, recalled how 'the bulk of the cream reaching the butter factories (was) derived from dairy-ranching, a system under which ranch cows – or others of a non-dairy type – were milked for a few months of the year, depending on the nature of the season, the milk separated and the cream sent to the creamery for conversion into butter'.⁵⁹ Giving evidence to the Committee into the Economic Position in 1939, Cory expressed the opinion that dairy farming in Southern Rhodesia had grown up out of necessity, with little sign of organized effort:

Fourteen years ago when I came to the country, I found the dairy industry was really in its infancy and it had been established on quite a wrong foundation. In many cases, particularly in Matabeleland, the creameries were dependent for their supplies on herds which were not originally bought for dairying purposes. They were ranching cattle and owing to the outbreak of various diseases, particularly East Coast Fever, which had locked these up in quarantine for a number of years, the farmers were forced to start milking them because they could not be sold as live cattle.⁶⁰

To the extent that they could obtain an extra monthly cheque, especially when they could not sell their cattle profitably, ranchers found it was a tremendous advantage for them to milk their ranch cows. This scenario, which was still prevalent until the outbreak of the Second World, meant that the dairy industry was dominated by amateurs rather than specialists.

IV

The foundation of commercial dairying as a side-line to beef cattle ranching was also reflected in the paucity of dairy cattle in the country, and the poor management of the few that were available. While undercapitalization, as Samasuwo has demonstrated for the entire livestock industry, led to a paucity of pedigree cattle, the situation was worse in dairy farming where farmers were hesitant to invest in dairy cows. Although good dairy cattle could be imported from South Africa through the Friesland Cattle Breeders' Association (with which the government had established an arrangement),⁶¹ or from England, many of Southern Rhodesian farmers

⁵⁸ NAZ, S/ZIM 018, E. A. Maidment, 'Report of a tour in Rhodesia, 1910', p. 425.

⁵⁹ NAZ, Oral/217, John Richmond Cory.

⁶⁰ NAZ, ZAY 2/2/13, 'Amended oral and written evidence to the committee into the economic position of

the colony, chaired By Downie. Dairy Produce', Mr J. R. Cory (witness) 25 Jan. 1939.

⁶¹ Weinmann, *Agricultural research and development*, p. 157.

opted for beef cattle, or dual-purpose breeds which could enable them to produce beef. The availability of small loans to farmers for the purchase of pedigree stock did not improve matters. In 1926 Hamilton lamented that '[dairy] farmers are, however, not supporting the government loan scheme for the purchase of dairy stock to the same extent as was anticipated'.⁶² J. S. Brown, a member of the Dairy Industrial Control Board (which had been established in 1931 to regulate the marketing of dairy products), lamented that 'in [the herds] I know of, there are not more than 20 dairy cows'.⁶³ Although mixed farming was generally encouraged, especially when it applied to maize growing and cattle rearing, the milking of beef cattle was discouraged.⁶⁴ As late as 1935, the Committee of Enquiry into the Dairy and Pig Industries complained that:

The sale of cream from beef herds has increased ... This practice is very much against the interests of both the dairy and beef industries, inasmuch as, while increasing the colony's surplus cream supplies, it retards the growth and injures the constitution of beef calves.⁶⁵

The management of dairy herds was one problem with which those farmers who had gained access to good dairy cattle had to contend. Given the climatic difficulties, particularly in the south-western regions, dairy cattle needed supplementary feeding for most of the dry months in the country, when pastures were low. However, most farmers did not have sufficient funds for this purpose. After a reconnaissance tour of settler dairy farms in 1939, T. Adams, a member of the Dairy Industry Control Board, reported that he had never 'seen a dairy herd in this country that was properly fed all through the year [as] it could not be done'. With most farmers unable to afford supplementary feed, Friesland cattle which had been imported from South Africa tended to deteriorate from the time they arrived in the country due to ill-feeding, especially during the dry winter months. As Adams observed, 'the quality of stock around Salisbury in 1939 is inferior to that of the 1920s'.⁶⁶

As part of efforts to improve the quality and productivity of cows, the state introduced a Milk Recording Scheme in 1928. Based on Australian and South African models, the Dairy Division employed an official recorder, who paid monthly visits to dairy farmers who entered the programme and compiled a record of the milk and butter-fat production capacity of each animal on test, the feed consumption, feed cost and the gross income for each cow.⁶⁷ The underlying rationale was to measure – and ultimately improve – the productivity of each cow, and the elimination of unproductive animals from the dairy herds. The programme, which was entirely voluntary, thus facilitated interaction between producers and state experts.

The scheme was poorly supported, however. In 1930, Hamilton reported that only 1333 cows belonging to some 32 farmers had been placed under the programme. This was aggravated by the fact that each participating farmer was charged 6d. per cow per month for the first ten

⁶² *Annual Report of the Dairy Expert*, 1926.

⁶³ NAZ, S1215/1366/2, Dairy Control Board Minutes, 11 Oct. 1939.

⁶⁴ Growing maize, and other products like beans, and legumes is considered helpful for livestock keepers insofar as the crops provide cheap feed for livestock, while livestock also provide cheap manure for crops. The two are symbiotic. See, for instance, J. Cory, 'The

feeding of dairy stock in Southern Rhodesia', *Rhodesia Agricultural J.* 27, (1930), pp. 24–32.

⁶⁵ *Report of the Committee of Enquiry into Certain Aspects of the Dairy and Pig Industries* (1935), p. 3.

⁶⁶ NAZ, 1215/1366/2, Dairy Control Board Minutes, 7 June 1939.

⁶⁷ *Report of the Dairy Expert*, 1929, p. 12.

cows, and 3*d.* for each additional one.⁶⁸ More worrying for the Dairy Division was the ever decreasing number of farmers who entered their cows for the test. By 1934, milk recorders were complaining that many farmers who had initially entered their cows for recording were pulling out of the scheme.⁶⁹ The following statement by a member of the Eastern Victoria Farmers' Association succinctly reflects the general attitude towards the scheme:

A few of our members initially registered to participate in the Milk Recording Scheme, [because] it is standard practice in all successful dairying countries. However, because many of our farmers have neither proper dairy stock nor the requisite supplementary feed for dairy cows, most have had to withdraw in order to save themselves from [the] embarrassment the recorders' results brings.⁷⁰

Indeed, as Hamilton observed, genuine dairy cows (which were mostly Friesland) never exceeded a third of all cows that were milked in the country prior to the outbreak of the war. The vast majority of cows were either specialist beef cattle (predominantly Hereford, Sussex, Devon and Africander breeds) or the shorthorn, which was a dual-purpose breed.⁷¹

Owing to the high number of dabblers and amateurs in the dairy industry, the handling and processing of milk and butter-fat on the farms was often sub-standard throughout the interwar period. Unable to afford fences for the creation of paddocks, many ranchers kraaled their cattle at night and grazed them only during daytime, a system they adopted from indigenous practices. After touring many farms, Maidment complained that cattle were only allowed to graze during the day, and were trapped into unhealthy kraals at night. She complained the kraals 'are no protection as they are simply pieces of ground, with either walls built round or thick bush fences. Sometimes there are posts in the ground inside the kraal to which the cows are secured'.⁷² For hygienic purposes, she recommended that milking sheds be constructed at all dairy farms.

Yet, as late as the 1930s, most dairymen – both settler and African – had not erected any milking sheds, and milking in open kraals remained 'too frequent a practice'.⁷³ Giving evidence to the 1935 Commission of Enquiry, Dan Judson admitted that settler cream producers had not erected milking sheds with the result that milking in the kraals was the norm, rather than the exception.⁷⁴ Moreover, most reports by dairy inspectors show that neither African premises nor settler farms were equipped with the requisite infrastructure and implements. With no government financial and technical support, many African producers in the reserves could not afford to construct the required infrastructure such as milking sheds, proper dairies with

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁶⁹ *Report of the Dairy Expert*, 1934.

⁷⁰ NAZ, S482/476/39, 'Farmers' Associations, 1926–42': Woodward (position not given), Eastern Victoria Farmers' Association, to Cory, 21 June, 1929.

⁷¹ *Report of the Chief Dairy Officer*, 1934. The dominance of beef cattle continued beyond the First World War. For instance, according to statistical returns at the end of 1922, the numbers showed that 4684 cattle were imported into the country, and were made up of the following breeds: Shorthorns and Red Lincolns, 1736;

Devon, 775; Frieslands, 690; Herefords, 673; Aberdeen Angus, 405; Sussex, 215; together with a few South Devons, Ayrshire, Red Polls and Jerseys.

⁷² NAZ, S/ZIM 018, Maidment, 'Report of a tour in Rhodesia, 1910', p. 425.

⁷³ NAZ, S1216/D1/4, 'Dairy Industry: Regulations for and registration of farm dairies: 1930–32'. Memorandum by T. Hamilton, Dairy Expert, 15 May 1930.

⁷⁴ NAZ, ZAR 2/1/1, 'Written evidence to the commission of enquiry into certain aspects of the dairy and pig industries. Colonel Dan Judson, 2 Sept. 1934'.

concrete floors, or cooling implements for the cooling and treatment of milk and cream. Aggravating the situation for many of them was the general scarcity of water, itself a deliberate and long-standing characteristic of the reserve areas into which most Africans were thrown from the 1890s, but magnified by the passage of the Land Apportionment Act in 1930.⁷⁵ While he noted that water was indispensable for maintaining the health and general cleanliness of the individuals engaged in milking and separating cream, Hamilton reasoned that:

It is futile to expect the native cream suppliers concerned to observe any great degree of cleanliness in their habits or in their methods of producing milk and cream, and until such time as this matter receives attention, the cream produced by natives in these and similarly situated areas will continue to be of inferior quality.⁷⁶

Conditions of production on the farms were no better among white dairy farmers, however. Indeed, owing to the factors discussed earlier (undercapitalization, and the settlers' inability to invest in dairy farming) most settler dairy farms were not equipped with the requisite machinery, while milk and cream handling procedures were generally unsanitary. In reference to the Midlands and Matabeleland regions, Hamilton bemoaned that 'farmers have of late been compelled to milk owing to sheer necessity, and many possess no dairies, nor facilities for the proper handling of cream and milk'.⁷⁷ The 1935 Commission corroborated this, stating that:

Milking and separating are carried on under unhygienic conditions, resulting in contamination. There is also a great lack of care in the treatment of the milk immediately after milking and of the cream after separating.⁷⁸

Despite the availability of technical assistance through Gwebi College's demonstration farms⁷⁹, and considerably greater access to financial assistance, most white-owned dairy farms were still not run along proper dairying lines. The words of F. A. Lammas, the Bulawayo District Dairy Officer, in 1934, help to put the state of affairs into context. Describing a farm owned by a Mr Kirk, who was also involved in running the Gwelo Dairy, Lammas said; 'a more slovenly and dirty farm I imagine would be difficult to find. Mr Kirk by all accounts has had university training, and should be acquainted with the rudiments of dairying'.⁸⁰ In this light, and noting the inadequacy of all state interventions thus far, Hamilton recommended that the Dairy Produce Act, which had been passed in 1925 to regulate creamery processes, should be extended to regulate farmers' operations. He suggested that all milk and cream producers needed to be compulsorily registered under the same conditions and regulations that applied to creameries and cream depots.⁸¹ These calls were heeded in 1937, with the passage of the Dairy Act, which brought all farm operations under tight state control.

⁷⁵ See B. N. Floyd, 'Land apportionment in Southern Rhodesia', *Geographical Rev.*, 52 (1962), pp. 567-70.

⁷⁶ NAZ, S1193/D1/2, Cory to Hamilton, 20 May 1927.

⁷⁷ NAZ, S1193/D1/2, Hamilton to the Secretary for Agriculture, 11 Mar. 1927.

⁷⁸ *Report of the commission of enquiry into certain aspects of the dairy and pig industries*, p. 8.

⁷⁹ Gwebi College, among other demonstration

centres in the country, was established to give white farmers instruction in farming and to conduct experiments on livestock and arable farming.

⁸⁰ NAZ, 1368/7/48, Monthly Reports, Report of the Bulawayo District Dairy Officer for Mar. 1934.

⁸¹ NAZ, S1193/D1/2, Hamilton to the Secretary for Agriculture, 11 Mar. 1933.

V

For much of the pre-1920 period, milk and butter production figures remained low, with the country increasingly relying on imports to supplement local production. While Southern Rhodesia imported 239,498 lbs of butter valued at £12,947 in 1907, 349,384 lbs, valued at £24,056, were imported in 1915. Similarly, while cheese imports in 1907 amounted to 17,095 lbs, valued at £12,947, the figure had reached 20,078 lbs, valued at £18,585 in 1916.⁸² Commenting on this state of affairs in 1920, Hamilton lamented how a 'considerable amount of money is passing out of the country which might be well retained here'.⁸³ As discussed in the previous section, the major reasons behind the low production of butter and cheese included adverse climatic conditions, undercapitalization, and lack of expertise. These factors, as already demonstrated and further delineated below, manifested themselves in the dominance of non-specialists in the dairy industry as beef production became the prime objective for farmers.

Indeed, an examination of the butter production patterns during the tenure of the BSAC will show that the development of commercial dairy farming was heavily reliant on the fortunes of the beef industry. As in England during the late nineteenth century, when, as Taylor has demonstrated, dairy farming lagged behind other sectors because of its low potential for profitability,⁸⁴ the Southern Rhodesian dairy industry initially straggled far behind other livestock industries, with production heavily relying on the fortunes of the beef industry. A similar situation also prevailed in Bechuanaland where dairy production was only stimulated during the 1930s owing to the decline of beef production, which itself was caused by South Africa's restriction of cattle imports.⁸⁵

As shown on Figure 1, butter production in Southern Rhodesia, which had been quite low for much of the period before 1914, received a boost when the outbreak of the First World War led to the disruption of trade with overseas markets. With cattle exports initially disturbed by the outbreak of war, most ranchers began to look to milk and butter production for the local market as a remedy. Consequently, butter production, which stood at 151,916 lbs in 1914, soared to 294,568 lbs the following year. However, as cattle, maize and tobacco exports began to increase due to increased demand from overseas from 1916 until the end of the war, butter production fell to 209,439 lbs in 1918.⁸⁶ Ngadze has stated that the decline in butter production after 1915 must have been due largely to war-time demand for cattle, resulting in many dairy ranchers stopping milking their cows.⁸⁷ This demand, which had helped cattle owners build up an export trade, gave way to a depression in prices by 1921–22. Inevitably, the 1921–22 depression in cattle and maize prices saw many ranch owners begin to turn to milk and butter production. In 1921 Nobbs reported that the dairy industry has received a 'considerable stimulus not only from the gradual opening of overseas markets, but also from the low prices of maize and the difficulties foreseen in the way of finding markets for beef cattle'.⁸⁸

⁸² Ngadze, 'Development of commercial dairying', p. 5.

⁸³ NAZ, SRG 3/AGR 5, 'Report of the Chief Dairy Officer, 1923'.

⁸⁴ Taylor, 'English dairy industry, 1860–1930', p. 158.

⁸⁵ Mafela, 'Colonial Initiatives', p. 77.

⁸⁶ Ngadze, 'Development of commercial dairying', p. 5.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 6.

⁸⁸ NAZ, SRG 3/AGR 5, 'Report of the Director of Agriculture, 1921'.

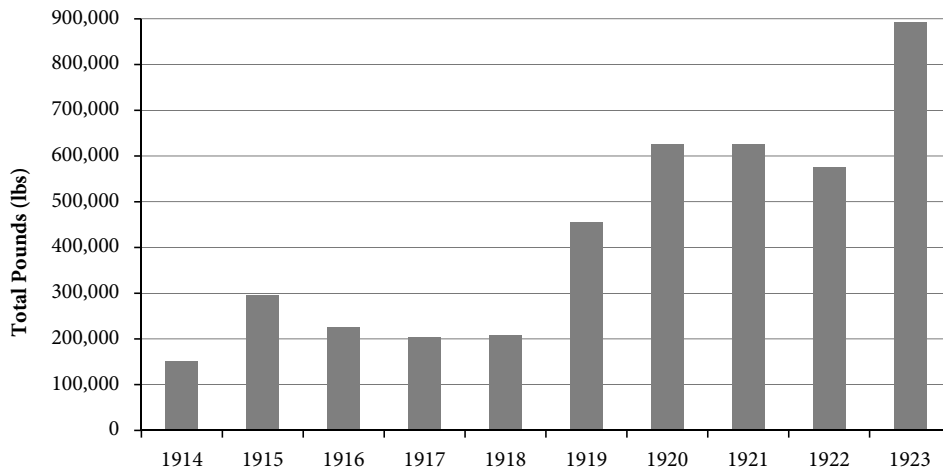


FIGURE 1: Butter production levels between 1914 and 1923 in Southern Rhodesia.

Source: Report of the committee of enquiry into certain aspects of the dairy and pig industries, p. 34.

Not unexpectedly, butter production figures, which had fallen from 1916 onwards, bounced back from 1922, and record levels were achieved successively in 1923 and 1924 when 338,343 lbs and 425,018 lbs respectively were manufactured on farms.⁸⁹ Figure 1 illustrates the butter production levels between 1914 and 1923.

The inverse relationship between the beef and dairy industries indicates that the cattle that were used for beef production were, indeed, the same that were used for the production of dairy products. Most ranchers who initially neglected dairy farming and established themselves as beef producers turned to butter and milk production in the early 1920s when beef prices had fallen. Indeed, in 1923 Nobbs reported that 'as a direct result of the difficulties in the way of selling slaughter cattle, attention is being forced towards dairying. This, in the case of the smaller man, is a most desirable development'.⁹⁰

As a result of increasing output of cream and milk from the farms, a number of creameries were established. By 1923, four cooperative creameries were operating in the territory, *viz*, the Gwelo Creamery; the Farmers' Co-operative Creamery Depot, Salisbury; the Rhodesia Co-operative Creamery, Bulawayo; and the Model Dairy in Bulawayo.⁹¹ In addition, no fewer than 24 cheese factories were in operation, and, as in the case of creameries, most of them were established between 1921 and 1923. With the increase in the number of creameries, the amount of farm-made butter made began to decrease, while creamery butter recorded substantial increases. The output of creamery butter was 554,206 lbs in 1923, as against 282,550 lbs in 1922; while that of farm butter fell from 391,058 lbs to 338,343 lbs during the same period.⁹² While increased output in milk, cheese and butter might point to industrial expansion, and thus

⁸⁹ Ngadze, 'Development of commercial dairying', p. 6.

⁹⁰ *Report of the Director of Agriculture, 1923.*

⁹¹ Three previously privately owned butter factories

were bought by farmers in Salisbury, and amalgamated to form the Farmers' Co-operative Industries in 1921.

⁹² Weinmann, *Agricultural Research and development*, p. 123.

paint a glowing picture of the industry's development, it hides the fact that this growth was premised, as Corry observed, on a fundamentally flawed foundation. As shown in the next section, this was cruelly exposed from the mid-1920s onwards, when Southern Rhodesian butter failed to compete on the export markets effectively.

VI

The circumstances in the beef industry, which had been largely responsible for the dairying 'boom', persisted throughout the 1920s, hence contributing to the continued expansion of butter, milk and cheese production, and the colony's entrance onto the export scene. We contend that increasing butter production beyond local demand forced the country to enter the highly competitive export market at a time when the local industry was not in a position to compete with the major producing countries of the world. The post-1921 decade period was characterized by an unprecedented growth in both farm butter (butter made on the farm by the cattle owner) and creamery butter. As the Figure 2 shows, output trebled between 1922 and 1927.

A significant feature in the distribution of the increase in butter production was the geographical imbalance that had begun to emerge by the early 1920s. Although the Matabeleland region had, over time, become perceived to be more suited to a cattle economy, its output of butter was generally lower than that of Mashonaland, which had begun to contribute the 'great bulk' of the country's butter and cheese.⁹³ In his 1928 report, Hamilton stated that 'Mashonaland farmers continue to make the great bulk of our locally produced butter and cheese'.⁹⁴ Thus, although topographically Matabeleland was better suited to cattle ranching, its considerably more arid climate was less suitable for milk production when compared to Mashonaland.

An important consequence of the increase in dairy production was that the country had to enter the export market by 1924. Even during the years when droughts produced a decrease in production, the output of butter still exceeded local demand. This development, therefore, was not so much indicative of the growth and maturation of dairy farming industry as it was a result of oversupply of the domestic market. Indeed, the relatively small settler population in the country during this time ensured that there would always be more butter than the internal market could consume. Despite the policy to attract as many settler immigrants into the country as possible, the settler community constituted a very small proportion of Southern Rhodesia's total population at any time in the country's history. As Figure 3 shows, the white population constituted about 4.4 per cent of the total population in 1921, and had risen to a mere 4.7 per cent by 1941.

The African population, which comprised the country's majority, was not an outlet for butter. Predominantly rural, the vast majority of Africans did not consider butter, cheese and market milk to be an important part of their diet. Africans had their own 'traditional' methods of processing and preparing milk products which persisted in parallel to the colonial market systems. Timothy Burke's study of the dynamics shaping the consumption of commodities in Southern Rhodesia reveals that although the 'tastes' and 'needs' of Africans were slowly

⁹³ *Report of the Dairy Expert, 1928.*

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*



FIGURE 2: Dairy Production, white farmers, 1922–27.

Source: Annual Reports of the Dairy Expert, 1923 and 1927.

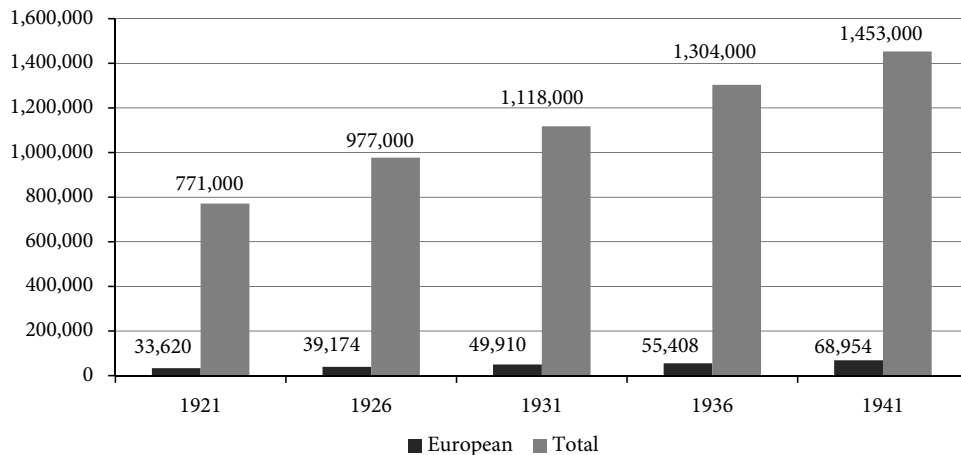


FIGURE 3: Settler and total population in Southern Rhodesia, 1921–f41.

Source: Adapted from B. M. Shutz, 'European population patterns, cultural persistence and political change in Rhodesia', *Canadian J. African Studies*, 7 (1973), p. 10.

changing as they became more integrated into the cash economy through proletarianization, their response to the consumption of market butter and cheese was slow.⁹⁵ In any case, their position on the periphery of the colonial socio-economic system meant that creamery butter, milk and cheese were beyond the reach of most rural Africans. Cory acknowledged that the industry would have to depend on the export market for the disposal of surplus butter, not because the country was producing huge stocks of butter in comparison with other countries, but because of the low domestic consumption levels at the time.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ T. Burke, *Lifebuoy men, Lux women. Commodification, consumption and cleanliness in Modern Zimbabwe*

(1996), pp. 63–77.

⁹⁶ NAZ Oral/217, John Richmond Cory, p. 4.

Thus, Southern Rhodesia began to look beyond its borders to dispose of its butter, and to a lesser extent, cheese. The major regional consumers of Southern Rhodesian butter were South Africa, Northern Rhodesia, Portuguese East Africa and Nyasaland, while Britain constituted the chief overseas market. Although fresh milk production was also soaring during the period under review, the rate of increase was relatively lower as most farmers chose to produce cream for the manufacture of butter. Considering its keeping qualities and the limited contemporary technology available, the movement of milk within the country, let alone outside the borders for export, was restricted. A surplus of butter was available for export each year between 1924 and the late 1930s. In 1926, for instance, 774,961 lbs, valued at £55,537, was exported to the Union of South Africa, Congo and Northern Rhodesia.⁹⁷

Yet, the country's successful participation on the international market hinged on its ability to produce commodities of a reasonably high quality, which would enable it to compete with other better established butter exporters. The issue of the quality had not been given much attention prior to 1924, but the low quality of Southern Rhodesian butter was dramatically exposed when the state began to look to regional and international markets for the disposal of its product. A government-authored pamphlet describing the general state of agriculture in 1924 succinctly captured the state of affairs in the dairy industry at the time:

The old days in Rhodesia when there was a local market for all that a farmer could produce have passed away ... as late comers into these (foreign) markets, it may be difficult to dispose of Rhodesian dairy products unless it can be proved that they are as good in quality as those produced by our competitors.⁹⁸

In the same pamphlet, the government conceded that nearly all the butter that was made on the farms was unsuitable for export on account of the 'unacceptably bad conditions under which it was made'.⁹⁹ But creamery butter too was not uniformly of export quality either. Reflecting on the 1924 season, Hamilton, the Dairy Expert, lamented that the 'proportion of low grade butter coming out of the creameries' churns is quite high'.¹⁰⁰ This state of affairs, as shall be explained later in this section, derived from a miscellany of factors, ranging from lack of dairy cows, inadequate infrastructure on the farms, unhygienic practices and the manufacturing procedures.

Creamery and farmers' representatives acknowledged the need for a concerted effort if Southern Rhodesia's dairy industry were to participate competitively on the international stage against long-established players like Canada, New Zealand and Denmark. A representative of the Rhodesia Creameries of Bulawayo lamented that the small local demand for butter was forcing creameries to look to 'enter the highly competitive regional and international markets at a time when the industry was still dominated by low grade butter

⁹⁷ *Report of the Dairy Expert, 1926.*

⁹⁸ NAZ, S1193/D1/2, 'Dairy Industry Correspondence': Secretary (name not given), Bulawayo Creameries, to Cory, 1 Feb. 1925.

⁹⁹ *The dairy industry in Southern Rhodesia* (Pamphlet prepared for the Wembley British Empire Exhibition, 1924).

¹⁰⁰ NAZ, S1193/D1/2, 'Dairy Industry Correspondence': T. Hamilton to the Secretary for Agriculture, 29 Dec. 1924.

¹⁰¹ NAZ, S1193/D1/2, 'Dairy Industry Correspondence': Secretary (name not given), Bulawayo Creameries, to Cory, 1 Feb. 1925.

and cheese'.¹⁰¹ In the same vein, the chairman of the Umtali District Farmers' Association submitted in 1925 that his association 'considers that something should be done to improve the grade of butter that is produced in this country, [the] quality of the article is very bad'.¹⁰² The Assistant Dairy Expert, Cory, admitted in 1924 that 'not less than half of the country's butter was either second or third grade, particularly in the Matabeleland province where temperatures [are] higher and rainfall erratic'.¹⁰³ State attempts to improve circumstances in the industry through the passage of the Dairy Produce Act of 1925 were largely futile since the legislation focused more on the creamery processes than on farm operations. By providing for the compulsory registration and inspection of butter and cheese manufacturing processes and compulsory registration of all creameries, cream depots and cheese factories, and only providing for the periodic visits to farms by dairy officers, the legislation missed an opportunity to control dairy farm methods.¹⁰⁴

Consequently, the country continued to market low-grade butter throughout the 1930s, often with disastrous financial consequences for both farmers and creameries. The general outlook was succinctly captured by the Senior Officer in Animal Husbandry in 1930. While acknowledging that 'considerable improvements in plant and organisation have been made at creameries', he added that:

Little improvement is evident as far as the general quality of cream supplies is concerned. Large quantities of second and third grade cream, which become increasingly difficult to market each year, continue to be produced. Much of this low grade cream is produced by dairy farmers ... who, in many cases, would be wiser in the long run to confine themselves to beef production.¹⁰⁵

Indeed, a member of the Rhodesia Butter Agencies only identified as Straith, stated in 1935 that, whilst Southern Rhodesia produced the highest amount of butter in Southern Africa after South Africa, 'there is a dearth in first grade butter in this country'.¹⁰⁶ The veracity of Straith's comments may be corroborated by the fact that, at a time when the country was exporting surplus second- and third-grade butter in the region as well as to Britain, Southern Rhodesia was also importing first-grade butter to supplement faltering local production throughout the late 1920s and 1930s.¹⁰⁷ The way in which Southern Rhodesia struggled in international butter markets may be reflected by the fact that its exports were often conducted at a loss. In

¹⁰² NAZ, S1193/D1/2, Dairy Industry Correspondence: A. Howat, Umtali District Association, to Downie, Minister of Agriculture and Lands, 8 Feb. 1925.

¹⁰³ NAZ, ZAY 2/2/13, Amended oral and written evidence (Dairy Produce) to the commission of enquiry into the economic position of the Colony 25 Jan. 1939.

¹⁰⁴ Under the Dairy Produce Act, dairy officers were employed within the Dairy Division to regularly monitor and inspect registered premises, to ensure that minimum hygienic and quality standards were followed. As a quality control measure, the chemical composition of butter was regulated, with a stipulation that all creamery butter should contain no less than

80% milk fat, no more than 16% water and a maximum of 4% salt.

¹⁰⁵ *Report of the Senior Officer in Animal Husbandry, 1930.*

¹⁰⁶ NAZ, ZAR 2/1/1 Oral and written evidence to the commission to enquire into certain aspects of the dairy and pig industries, 3 Sept. 1935.

¹⁰⁷ This point is mentioned many times in correspondence between the Ministry of Agriculture officials and the Dairy Expert. For example, see NAZ, S1193/D1/2, Hamilton to the Secretary, Department of Agriculture, 18 Feb. 1929.

1929, for instance, 15,000 lbs of second- and third-grade butter were exported to the Union of South Africa alone at a loss of 4*d.* per lb.¹⁰⁸ The Great Depression affected virtually the entire agricultural sector between the late 1920s and mid-1930s, but circumstances in the dairy industry were exacerbated by long-term problems associated with marketing low grade products.

VII

This article has delineated the development of dairy farming in Southern Rhodesia from 1908, when the White Agricultural Policy was adopted, until the passage of the Dairy Act in 1937, which aimed at revolutionizing the entire production and marketing structure of the industry. Although the state saw the development of the dairy industry as vital for the success of its larger plans to grow the white population through the encouragement of settler immigration (as was the case in Australia), we have demonstrated how, by the mid-1930s, the industry was standing on shaky foundations. Despite concerted state efforts to encourage its development, the sub-optimal natural conditions which existed in the country had a debilitating impact on dairy farming. Moreover, the fact that dairy farming is a sensitive undertaking, requiring a relatively large outlay of capital, expertise and special care discouraged many cattle-owners from investing in dairy production on a long-term basis.

This is what happened in Bechuanaland, where dairy farming only began to be taken seriously in the 1930s, when South Africa imposed restrictions on the import of beef cattle. Dairy farming initially developed as a side-line activity to beef production, with the result that most of the butter was produced by farmers whose main interest lay in beef production. Indeed, an analysis of the production trends throughout the period under review shows that butter and milk production only expanded in response to difficulties in the marketing of meat. Although the expansion in output that was experienced from the 1920s might paint a rosy picture of the state of affairs in the industry, we have argued that much of the milk and cream that was produced locally was derived from beef cattle ranchers who merely dabbled in dairying when beef prices dropped. Moreover, Southern Rhodesia's entrance into the world market from 1923 onwards, itself necessitated by the small local market for butter and milk, was premature, and for that reason, the dairy farmers and creameries struggled to participate in external markets profitably. Thus, notwithstanding state rhetoric on the potential of dairy farming in Southern Rhodesia, the industry was merely suckling on the udders of the beef industry throughout the interwar years.

¹⁰⁸ NAZ, S1193/D1/2, Hamilton to the Secretary, Department of Agriculture, 28 Nov. 1929.