

CHARLIE FULLER

It was pleasant to reminisce with Charlie Fuller, our elderly farmer, on how farming has seen many changes in his life-time but, unlike most industries, the principles of growing and stimulating crop growth and caring for animals are basic to life: 'in farming we deal with living material and not inert substances such as steel or plastic'.

Milk production has been the mainstay of the farming at the owner-occupied 230-acre Earl's Farm. For a short time in 1959 Charlie retailed TT milk in disposable wax-containers. With a glint in his eye he spoke about the early days when one had to hawk the milk around among purchasing dairies such as United Dairies or Jobs Dairies. Some folk will remember the huge 17-gallon churns – pictorial for a country scene but in no way suitable for man handling. The churn has now been replaced by the bulk collecting road tanker.

Sitting at his desk he pulled out a record book, remarking how the quality of milk was maintained by accepting or rejecting the milk on arrival at the dairy unloading bay, first by whiff and smell immediately the churn lid came off. When in doubt as to the keeping quality, one milk receptionist used a small saucepan for his boiling test. What a difference today: all milk is tested once a week by the Milk Marketing Board (MMB) for hygienic quality (Resazarin test), composition test for butterfat and solids not fat, plus many other tests.



Charlie Fuller with his sheep



S1 milking parlour: the cows come to the milker who feeds them individually and milks them mechanically, the milker working from a pit

In the early days the milking of the 30 cows was done by hand, there being seven men at Earls Farm, some of whom milked eight cows. Jim Brain (Hempton Road) was with the Fullers at Thorpe Mandeville where they first farmed, and came to Earl's Farm with them in 1935, the cows walking the distance.

During the war a McCormack (Canadian) bucket mechanical milker was installed. Here let me add that, properly maintained, the machine is a more natural method to milking than by hand. It copies the calf suckling; the teat cup outer shell is made of light metal with a soft inner rubber lining with intermittent vacuum collapsing between the shell and rubber lining. The cow lets her milk down to the rhythm – this is obviously better than physically squeezing and pulling by hand often causing injury to the sphincter muscle.

Like many of our elder farmers Charlie thanks the day when the MMB came into existence. The MMB has the monopoly of buying all milk produced on the farms and markets it accordingly, a guaranteed price being achieved by farmers.

Turning round in his chair Charlie produced yet another book indicating the sale of milk right back to 1926 when milk was 11s. 2d per gallon up to 1981 at 12.7p per litre.

Mr Fuller was a Parish Councillor for 40 years and a Rural District Councillor for ten years. Remarking on the free aspect of meetings, he maintains there is more interest taken today in council matters than in the past. He is not at all happy with the influence that politics have in today's district council deliberations and reflects how in the old days councillors were volunteers and not assisted in their council work. He is a great supporter of the M40 motorway, stating that the traffic through Deddington is now a nightmare and motorways are much better than by-passes. The loss of ten acres of land to straighten the curves on Deddington Hill, although beneficial to traffic, is an extra hazard for farmers. The traffic lights at the crossroads have been a great benefit to the village in reducing the speed of through traffic.

Like most elderly farmers who have seen the progression of mechanisation – Earl's Farm had the first tractor in the district – Charlie recalls nostalgically the satisfaction one had in working with the farm horses; after a hard day in the fields there followed the feeding and bedding down of the horses, then the checking before bed time to see that they were nicely settled. You gave them that symbolic clap on the withers – you can't clap a tractor.

Mr and Mrs Fuller have two married daughters and a son, Brian. They have seven grandchildren. Brian is continuing the partnership in farming in Earl's Lane. They originally came from Ealing and with Earl's Farm in Earl's Lane it was natural when building their present house to call it Earl's Court.

I am still pondering over a statement Charlie made: 'progress doesn't necessarily mean improvement' – ah well!

Bill Marshall