

Interview with Charles Hartke
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Excerpt from Interview # 1: September 23, 2008
Interviewer: Mark DePue

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DePue: Well, tell me about the chores, especially the chores you had to do early in the morning, maybe.

Hartke: My early morning chores, since I was one of the littler guys, when we had the dairy cattle, I climbed the silo and shoveled the silage out for some twenty-five or thirty dairy cattle that we had. Usually the heifers and the bull and whatever. But I got scoops of silage out or forked the silage out down the shoot and then delivered it with a wheelbarrow to the cattle to be fed. Also fed a lot of hay, and then while the milking cows were in their stanchions, I did a lot of bedding. My brother Frank and I crawled into the loft, get two bales of straw down and maybe two bales of hay in the bunk. I forget what exactly amount. But that was some of my chores, everyday chores. Brother Frank, I know, was relegated to the chicken house and picking up the eggs. He did not want to be a farmer after that experience, so okay, that's fine.

DePue: Well, how about the girls? Did they get their share of chores?

Hartke: Oh, they did. Of course, they were older. With a dairy operation, we had some beef cattle. There was lots of baling that had to be done, and they get to do that. Usually two of the girls, I would say Margie—Mary Lou, I'm not sure about. Margie and Sally did a lot of the milking. Putting together the milkers was a good task. I think Pat did a lot of that. That was one of the things; she's first up, out to the barn, put the milkers together.

DePue: Were these mechanical milkers?

Hartke: Yes. As a matter of fact, I just was at a family wedding this Saturday and was talking to my sister, Marge, and I talked about DeLaval and I mentioned that a couple of times, and she called me this week and says, "No, no, no. It wasn't DeLaval, Chuck, it was Surge. We had Surge equipment and we bought it from Pals Dairy Equipment in Effingham.

DePue: Well, I'm afraid you're going to have to explain DeLaval to me.

Hartke: DeLaval is a brand name like Surge Milkers.

DePue: Okay, okay. Was this fairly recent innovation on the farms in this region, that you'd have the mechanical milkers?

Hartke: Oh, I'm sure. My dad, and grandpa in particular, were innovators. Everybody liked to work for my grandpa, because one of the things that he did do for the young men that worked for him, the high school kids. He would pile them all in some kind of automobile and make a long trip to Springfield, Illinois, to go to the state fair. You could see everything at the state fair. If you worked for Henry Hank you got a trip, a one day trip to the state fair.

DePue: And that's where they see all the new innovative farm equipment?

Hartke: New, innovative farm equipment and disks and plows and tractors and anything that's possible. My grandfather was determined that we were going to have the best. When electricity came around in this part of the country, this road going past here was CIPS, Central Illinois Public Service Company. We live a mile over and farmers that had had electricity on this road, that's fine, but they weren't going to serve everybody. That was before we had REA, Rural Electric. The cities—

DePue: This would have been early thirties, then, maybe?

Hartke: Right. The cities had electricity, but the rural countries didn't, unless you were along the line. Grandpa built a line between here and his place, one mile, holes and everything else, and paid for it so that we would have electricity and electric motors and things.

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DePue: You know, I guess I forgot to ask you earlier. Describe the farm that you grew up on.

Hartke: Usually eighteen, twenty milk cows. Maybe fifteen or twenty beef cattle. Raised a calf and we sold him to steers or finished him out. We had maybe eight or ten brood sows and a boar. Usually 300 laying hens, which meant that we had 300 broilers that we fed out. And, usually in mid-July, we were butchering chickens. It was a typical farm. We had three hucksters that came on Monday, Wednesday and Friday to stop by bringing cereal or bread and we'd sell the eggs and so forth. We sold milk, I believe, to Pevely Dairy for a while, and then it was Prairie Farms that actually bought our milk, and they were there, I think, every day or every other day and picked up the milk and milk cans. We had, I don't know, four, five, ten gallons of milk that were picked up. Of course, the milk cooler was the greatest place to put a watermelon to keep it cold.

