

The cream in the "churn" is whipping and turning to butter as I write this. There is a whirring sound from the electric motor, but it isn't much noisier than the little glass churn I used for many years. Sitting and turning the crank on that churn wasn't completely quiet, either. A few years ago I tried the bowl and whisk--the part I had never used-- on the Swedish bread mixer, as a butter maker, and it worked so well that I never used the churn again. Now, I can write this newsletter or do some other task while the cream whips, turns grainy, and gathers into a yellow mass swimming in pale buttermilk.

This is not the usual progression of life here. We switched from machine sheep shearing to the hand blade method years ago. The rototiller is not the main garden tool; that job falls to the hoe. We milk Buttercup and Effie by hand and turn the cream separator the same way.

But, making butter can be a time consuming and onerous job. Sometimes, the butter forms very quickly. But, in some instances, it takes as much as a half hour to churn. I'd rather do something more interesting during that time than turn the handle of the churn.

People can't believe me when I tell them I need to have fifty pounds of butter--plus what we use during the summer-fall seasons when we are milking--to get us through the winter. I am not even sure if that amount is enough. I use butter or olive oil for nearly all of our cooking. I do use home-rendered lard for pie crust, but baking anything else usually involves the generous use of butter or cream.

We milk during the "grass season." The two milk cows pasture on the mixed grasses, legumes, and forbs that grow during that time of year. And, in fact, we milk only "half cows." Right now, only Buttercup is lactating. Effie has not had her calf yet. Runo milks two of Buttercup's udder quarters while her calf, Dokka, milks the other side. When Effie has her calf, or, as we say, "freshens," I will do the same. And, we milk only in the morning. Each evening, we invite the two cows into the barn, let their calves out of the pen they occupy most of the time, and the calves eat their fill. So, we get all the cream we need for butter and other uses, the calves are well fed, and the pigs have plenty of skim milk--what remains after the centrifuge of the cream separator has divided out the

rich cream.

We don't drink milk. I use a little in baking, and I make some soft cheeses, but, mostly, I want the cream for buttermaking and baking.

My favorite cake recipe calls for cream instead of butter or shortening. That means that if I am in a hurry, I don't need to fight with hard butter from the refrigerator in order to--as so many recipes state--"cream butter and sugar." If I want sour cream for the chocolate or spice varieties of the recipe, I just add a spoonful of vinegar to the cream.

But, still, we do need that fifty or more pounds of butter to carry us through the season when the cows are "dry." A lot of butter goes directly to Runo's bread. I don't eat butter that way myself. A childhood obsession that left finger marks in the butter dish when I scooped out some to eat by itself earned me not only a scolding from my mother but, eventually, a dislike for butter on its own. I prefer the taste of butter in foods, not spread on bread. But, there is no substitute for the flavor of butter in cinnamon rolls, croissants, Danish pastries, or melted on vegetables.

After decades of touting the superiority of margarine over butter for our health, medical research has also come around to believing in the virtues of butter. Our cows eat grass, not corn and soybeans, and we believe that both the meat and the milk our cattle produce are good for us. So, that fifty pounds of butter in the freezer comes to good use, and, as with most of the rest of our food, it is good to know where it came from and how it was produced.