

DAIRY FORAGE CENTER



Fig. 1. The forage lab, 1982. [Photo courtesy of Dairy Forage Center Office, copy in Author collection.]

The U. S. Dairy Forage Research Center is a federal facility, comprising two parts, the research laboratory in Madison, and the field facility near Baraboo. Broad cooperation exists between the Center and the University. The purpose of the center is to lower the cost of milk production and the cost of dairy products. The campus research facility opened in 1981.

The idea for a federal forage laboratory appeared as early as 1960, when the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) listed it as a priority item to be located in a north central state to serve the regional and national dairy industry. By 1962 dean Froker of the University Agriculture College had proposed that the regional facility be located at or near Madison. In April 1963 the Wisconsin legislature memorialized members of Congress to empower the USDA to construct such a research laboratory on the Madison campus. The proposed facility was for offices and labs and housing for 250 cows; at an estimated cost of \$2.5 million. This was the beginning of a long and protracted effort to obtain the facility for the Madison campus.¹

In 1967 more progress was made when senator William Proxmire began lobbying the senate Agricultural subcommittee (of which he was a member) to include the federal forage lab in their budget. The logic of locating the lab in the nation's leading dairy state was pointed out.²

As a result of this effort, Congress included in its Agricultural Appropriations bill for 1968 a request for a committee to make a feasibility study on the forage center. This committee recommended that a Dairy Cattle Forage Utilization Center be established in the north central region, and that it be located at or near the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Estimated costs had risen to \$5.9 million. On the strength of this report Proxmire was able to get the senate to include an appropriation of \$680,000 for planning money for the forage lab, but both times (1970 and 1971) the item was deleted by the Joint Conference Committee. In 1971 the senate asked the USDA to restudy the issue with an eye toward

reducing its size and cost. In 1972 this new study recommended against appropriating money for the lab. Dean of the Agricultural College Glenn Pound referred to this study as a "snow job". In 1974 the project was revived by interested dairy organizations. A letter of support from Senators Proxmire and Nelson (Wisconsin), Humphrey and Mondale (Minnesota), Clark (Iowa), Stevenson (Illinois), Bayh (Indiana) and other north central states to Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz supporting the dairy forage lab. Support was recommended by the House-Senate Report for the fiscal year 1975. Four regional study groups were appointed.³

By early 1977 the reports of these regional groups were completed, and in July 1977 the Senate approved \$1.1 million in planning funds for the center to be built at Madison. The 1977 North Central Region's proposal for the center calls for the center to be located at Madison with the field facilities, that is the 450 cattle and associated equipment, to be located on federal land at Baraboo, the site of the Badger Ordinance Works. The complete project, including the field facility was estimated to cost \$8 million and the lab building was to house a director and fifteen research scientists. The schedule called for construction to be completed in July 1982. Governor Lucey agreed to support the facility on the conditions that the state not be required to pay any operating costs other than utilities, or to buy land for the field facility if the Baraboo site was not available.⁴

In May 1978 the funding for the center was approved with a \$9 million budget limit. Senator Proxmire was the recipient of a Tarnished Fleece award from the Young Americans for Freedom for his efforts to bring the forage center to Wisconsin. This was a takeoff on Proxmire's own Golden Fleece awards for legislative "pork" projects. In late 1978 the Baraboo site for field work was confirmed, although the herd size was reduced to 300. The laboratory building in Madison was located on a parking lot (#12) north and west of the stock pavilion. This site had been considered for the College of Veterinary Medicine a few years earlier, but rejected because of limited size. The USDA received a fifty year lease on the land. The Madison facility would cost about \$6.5 million.⁵

On October 18, 1979, the general construction contract was awarded to the J. H. Findorff Company in the amount of \$5.2 million. Ground-breaking was held on October 26, 1979. Construction met with no unusual delays, and the dedication of the Dairy Forage Research Center was held on June 30, 1981, with remarks by congressmen Kastenmeier, Proxmire, and center director R. J. Bula.⁶

The building is three stories high, built of concrete block, sheathed in face brick. The first floor contains offices, animal rooms, storage, and a head house for the seven greenhouses at the back of the building. On the second floor are more offices, conference rooms, and laboratories. The third floor hold more laboratories, offices, and conference rooms. The "Engineering wing" on the southwest corner of the building contains more offices, shops and laboratories. This unit was originally optional if bids for the entire unit were too high for the budget. The forage center coordinates research at four other "cluster" sites, the University of Minnesota, Iowa State University, Cornell, and Michigan State University.

1) Chronology of Efforts ..., September 13, 1976, series 88/41 box 1. Some Aspects of the Development ..., Glen Pound, November 1979, series 90/80 box 14.

2) Chronology of Efforts ..., September 13, 1976, series 88/41 box 1; Hutchinson to Proxmire, May 12, 1969, series 40/1/7-1 box 123.

3) Chronology of Efforts ..., September 13, 1976, series 88/41 box 1;

4) Proposal for North Central Regional Dairy Forage Research Center, February 10, 1977, Pound To Lucey, April 5, 1977, series 90/80 box 14; *Wisconsin State Journal*, March 31, 1977.

5) Memorandum, Scornicka to Shain, November 8, 1978, series 4/31/9-2 box 1; *Regent's Minutes*, March XX, 1978; *Daily Cardinal*, May 15, 1978; *Wisconsin State Journal*, May 11, 1978, October 13, 1978; *Milwaukee Journal*, May 28, 1978. North Central Dairy - Forage Research Center, November 30, 1978, series 4/31/9-2 box 1.

6) *Wisconsin State Journal*, October 27, 1979; News Release, August 24, 1979, series 90/80 box 14; *Baraboo News Republic*, November 1, 1979. Dedication Programs, June 30, 1981, papers of Dairy Forage Laboratory.