



# The REAL dairy crisis

Is dairying across the country under threat? Glenn Dwight explains.

**O**kay, I admit it, the headline is classic clickbait. This article has nothing to do with dairy products other than the subject is where a city slicker like me might go to buy said products on a Sunday morning when there is no milk left in the fridge.

Yes, I'm talking about that fine Kiwi establishment that is usually found under a giant Tip-Top sign in towns and cities across the country: the local dairy.

Dairies go by many names: Yug's Superstore, Lower Hutt; The Bull Dairy, Bulls; Woody's Winners, Wellsford. Much like ladies of the night, dairies come in all shapes and sizes, are usually found on street corners, and are consistent in what they offer – give or take.

## Under pressure

But why, you might ask, 'the REAL crisis'? The answer is because I believe these bastions of Kiwiness are in danger.

I am a dairy lover. I remember after our 'draw' in the Cricket World Cup Final purchasing a drink at the dairy on the way to work, and this simple transaction, which would normally take a minute, took 45 minutes as the owner and I debated the validity of the 'most boundaries' rule.

That was some of the best and most in-depth cricket analysis I've ever heard, with a touch of counselling thrown in – and all for the price of a can of fizzy.

So why are these fine establishments under pressure? After some extensive research, I believe I have found the main factors in the threat to the humble dairy.

Firstly, 'darts'. While I'm not a smoker, these did provide the backbone of my childhood dairy and many like it. While darts are still sold (behind heavy steel shutters alongside horrific health warnings), stocking them has become a health risk to dairy owners because of the high rate of robberies.

Another cause of loss for the Kiwi dairy has been health and safety. Don't get me wrong, I'm not encouraging poor practice here – I'm simply saying that health and safety rules around things like the sale of single unwrapped lollies saw the demise of the dollar mixture and has also forced little paper condoms onto ice-cream cones, thereby increasing the price and reducing sales.

While we're on the subject of dollar mixtures, inflation has pretty much put an end to those. In my day, a dollar mixture was a veritable cornucopia of various sweet delights. Now a dollar mixture will get you 10 lollies if you're lucky. And '2 dollar mixture' just doesn't have the same ring to it.

Then there's newspapers. The printed word used to be the other bread and butter of your corner dairy. Magazines, newspapers, comic books – you used to be able to find them all on the shelves of the dairy.

Sometimes dairies had so many magazines that they'd end up in the skip bin out the back with their tops cut off. (The ladies inside the magazines had often lost their tops too – dumpster diving used to be SO much more rewarding.)

Now, of course, everything's on the internet. And while that's a boon (or a curse) for teenage boys, the dairy owner once again misses out on a revenue stream.

Remember phone cards? The dairy used to be a technology hub. Running late and need to phone your family/boss/video rental store?

No worries, call into your local dairy, buy a \$10 phone card featuring some lovely New Zealand art or photography, and use a nearby payphone for the low, low cost of a dollar per minute!

And then when you became a yuppy Gordon-Gekko type with a mobile phone, you could call into a dairy to buy some more prepaid minutes. What a time to be alive.

## What's the answer?

The internet, inflation and health have all led to the parlous state in which dairies currently find themselves. How do they solve this existential crisis? Can dairies return to their original purpose?

Here's a thought: now that we all hate plastic and are concerned about food miles, maybe the corner dairy could be the place where we take our reusable glass bottles to fill up from a vat. Fresh cheese, butter and cream right from the corner.

All with a side of cricket chat, naturally. ■

*NZME Creative Director Glenn Dwight is known in the office for his love of gummy bears, particularly the green ones.*

