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2 Exploring the roots of high milk consumption in Finland

Introduction

Cow milk and dairy products are largely seen as an integral part of a healthy diet in Western countries. For example, when the Swedish oat milk company *Oatly* launched an advertising campaign in Finland in October 2020, which questioned the necessity of consuming cow milk, it ignited a heated debate among dairy industry representatives and milk producers and also among consumers. Milk is integrally associated with several crucial aspects of society: nutrition, agriculture and the food industry, human-animal relationships, politics and economics.¹ Moreover, a rich cultural imagery is associated with milk, from smiling cows to whiteness and purity.² This chapter focuses on the history of milk promotion in Finland, where the level of milk consumption has been the highest in the world for decades. Accordingly, dairy industry is still considered to be a cornerstone of Finnish agriculture, although milk consumption rates have been consistently declining since reaching a peak in the late 1950s, and the number of dairy farms has decreased rapidly.³

Statistics show that the majority of the world's largest milk consumers are European countries. At the same time, the dairy sector is the second-largest agricultural sector in the European Union and lactose intolerance is rather rare in several

1 Mathilde Cohen and Yoriko Otomo, "Introduction," in *Making Milk: The Past, Present and Future of Our Primary Food*, ed. by Mathilde Cohen and Yoriko Otomo (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 1–4.

2 Håkan Jönsson, *Mjölk – en kulturanalys av mejeridiskens nya ekonomi* (Stockholm/Stehag: Brutus Östlings Bokförlag Symposion, 2005); Hannah Velten, *Milk: A Global History* (London: Reaktion Books, 2010); Deborah Valenze, *Milk: A Local and Global History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011).

3 "Wikipedia: List of countries by milk consumption per capita," last modified March 20, 2022, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_milk_consumption_per_capita; "Luke: Balance Sheet for Food Commodities 2020, preliminary and 2019 final figures," last modified June 24, 2021, <https://www.luke.fi/en/statistics/balance-sheet-for-food-commodities/balance-sheet-for-food-commodities-2020-preliminary-and-2019-final-figures>; Jyrki Niemi, "Livestock Production," in *Agriculture and Food Sector in Finland 2019*, ed. by Jyrki Niemi and Hanna Väre (Helsinki: Natural Resources Institute Finland, 2019), 36.

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European countries, especially in Northern and Central Europe.⁴ Moreover, in Atlantic Europe, cattle husbandry has been favourable due to the environmental conditions and the cool climate has helped in preventing the adulteration of milk.⁵ Although the earliest indications of human consumption of milk from another animal may be dated back to approximately 5000 BCE in the Near East, or even earlier times, the habit of drinking milk in adulthood is limited to areas where people produce lactase even after childhood and are therefore able to digest lactose without stomach problems. Several reasons have been proposed for this characteristic: either populations who consumed milk for survival became genetically lactose-tolerant through evolution, or continued milk drinking from childhood into adulthood leads to lactose tolerance. It has been estimated that 75 to 80 percent of the world's population are lactose intolerant, and this is especially common in Asia, Africa, Southern Europe and among indigenous people in the Americas and the Pacific. This physical trait strongly affects the level of milk consumption in different areas and also the cultural understandings of milk.⁶

In this chapter, I am interested in the background to the Finnish fascination with milk and dairy products. I will explore the discourses concerning milk as nutrition and the promotion of milk consumption from the late nineteenth century to the 1930s. My main questions are the following: when and how was milk established as an essential element of the diet in Finland? What kind of knowledge and arguments were used to justify the need for increased milk consumption? I will use contemporary newspapers, journals, educational books, leaflets, and promotional films and placards as research material in this chapter. Most of the newspapers and journals can be found in the digital collections of the National Library of Finland,⁷ whereas the educational books and leaflets are stored in different libraries and archives.⁸ The promotional films may be watched via Elonet or at the National Audiovisual Institute.⁹ The analysis of these materials is inspired by cultural studies and aims to explore the different discourses prevalent in the history of milk consumption in Finland. Following the framework of new materialist thought, it is assumed in this chapter that objects, beings, words

4 “World Population Review: Milk Consumption by Country 2022,” last modified April 20, 2022, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/milk-consumption-by-country>.

5 Nicolau-Nos, Roser, Josep Pujol-Andreu, and Ismael Hernández, “Milk, Social Acceptance of a New Food in Europe: Catalonia, 19th–20th Centuries,” *Dynamis* 30 (2010): 127.

6 Velten, *Milk*, 15–16, 21–23.

7 “National Library of Finland: Digital collections,” last modified April 20, 2022, https://digi.kansalliskirjasto.fi/etusivu?set_language=en.

8 I would like to thank Eeva Nikkilä and Sara Vatanen for their excellent work in mapping out different digital and manual materials related to the early promotion of milk in Finland.

9 “Elonet,” last modified June 3, 2022, <https://elonet.finna.fi/>.

and images constitute the world and the meanings inherent in it.¹⁰ As milk promotion has had similar features in other Nordic countries and Northern Europe in the early twentieth century, it can be assumed that the findings of this study have larger significance regarding the history of milk consumption.¹¹

In the following section, I will discuss the situation of agriculture and the significance of butter production in Finland around the turn of the twentieth century. Thereafter I will focus on the modernisation of the dairy industry in Finland in the early twentieth century. The last empirical section explores the intense promotion of milk in Finland in the 1920s and 1930s. The concluding section will summarise the most significant findings of the study.

From grain farming to commercial butter production at the turn of the twentieth century

In traditional Finnish agrarian culture, milk products had a minor role in the diet, because the number of cows on farms was small and they usually did not lactate in winter due to poor feeding. Adults did not drink fresh milk, but it was given to children when available. However, buttermilk and sour milk were popular drinks among adults as they were non-perishable and hence did not require cold storage. Milk was also used for making butter and cheese. Butter, however, was rarely consumed on farms as it was mainly used to pay taxes. Butter, as well as curdled milk, was only served at special festivities.¹² In Finland, the diet in nineteenth-century agrarian culture was based on grain, especially barley and rye. Everyday meals consisted of salted fish or sometimes salted meat, usually

¹⁰ See Diana Coole and Samantha Frost, “Introducing New Materialisms,” in *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, Politics*, ed. by Diana Coole and Samantha Frost. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010); Peter Atkins, *Liquid Materialities: A History of Milk, Science and the Law* (London: Routledge, 2016), 28–37; Inger Johanne Lyngø, “The National Nutrition Exhibition: A New Nutritional Narrative in Norway in the 1930s,” in *Food, Drink and Identity: Cooking, Eating and Drinking in Europe Since the Middle Ages*, ed. by Peter Scholliers (Oxford: Berg, 2001), 146.

¹¹ Carin Martiin, “Swedish Milk, a Swedish Duty: Dairy Marketing in the 1920s and 1930s,” *Rural History* 21 (2010): 214–215; Jönsson, *Mjök*, 31–37; Inger Johanne Lyngø, “The National Nutrition Exhibition.” Also see Karin Dirke’s chapter in the present volume.

¹² Gösta Grotenfelt, *Tietoja Suomen maitotalouden kehityksestä* (Kuopio: K. Malmströmin kirjapaino, 1906), 3, 7; Ilmar Talve, *Suomen kansanomaisesta ruokataloudesta* (Turku: Turun yliopiston kansatieteen laitos, 1973), 86; Merja Sillanpää, *Makeasta happamaan. Suomalaisen ruoka- ja tapakulttuurin kehitys* (Vantaa: Hyvää Suomesta, 1999), 27; Ritva Kylli, *Suomen ruokahistoria. Suomalihasta sushiin* (Helsinki: Gaudeamus, 2021), 52.

served with bread and vegetables, particularly potatoes.¹³ The situation was also similar in other countries, which later promoted the drinking of fresh milk, such as other Northern European countries and the United States: until the mid-nineteenth century, dairy products mainly consisted of cheese, sour milk and yogurt. Butter too was highly appreciated.¹⁴

In Finland, the emergence of dairy husbandry was strongly linked to the modernisation of agriculture, which started around the second half of the nineteenth century. At this time, farming was modernised by shifting production away from grain production and towards milk. Grain production had become unprofitable due to years of crop failure throughout the 1860s and the decreasing world market price of grain. There was also an increasing demand for butter on the international market. For these reasons, the Finnish government¹⁵ started to support cattle husbandry by establishing advisor organisations to counsel farmers on how to produce butter and cheese. Hence, dairy and milkmaid sections within the curriculum were introduced in agricultural schools, and loans were granted to establish dairies.¹⁶ The shift in production methods was linked to wider societal and cultural transformations: the second half of the nineteenth century was characterised by modernisation, industrialisation, and national awakening in Finland.

Hence, dairy production slowly became an important source of income for Finnish farmers. Cattle had previously been primarily kept for producing a supply of manure for grain fields, and milk was mainly used in household consumption. As the status of dairy farming was not yet established during the late nineteenth century, educational newspaper articles and guidebooks set out to increase the appreciation of animal husbandry and emphasise its significance as a livelihood. The central aim of education was to rationalise animal husbandry and replace traditional vernacular practices with more reasonable and profitable procedures.¹⁷

13 Sillanpää, *Makeasta happamaan*, 26; Kylli, *Suomen ruokahistoria*, 108–110.

14 E. Melanie DuPuis, *Nature's Perfect Food: How Milk Became America's Drink* (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 5.

15 In 1809, Finland was ceded from Sweden and became an autonomous grand duchy within the Russian Empire, after previously being part of the Swedish Empire. Finland became independent in 1917.

16 Viljo Rasila, "Overview of the History of Finnish Agriculture – from Prehistory to the 21st Century," in *Suomen maatalouden historia III. Suurten muutosten aika. Jälleenrakennuskaudesta EU-Suomeen*, ed. by Pirjo Markkola (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2004), 497–499; Seppo Simonen, *Lypsykarjatalousvaltainen tuotantojärjestelmä Suomessa. Maataloutta ja maatalouspolitiikkaa vuosisadan vaihteen molemmin puolin* (Helsinki: WSOY, 1949), 89–90.

17 Taija Kaarlenkaski, "Living Machines with Gentle Looks: Materiality and Animal Body in Modernizing Finnish Animal Husbandry," *Humanimalia* 11 (2019). doi: <https://doi.org/10.52537/humanimalia.9477>.

The first dairies were established in Finland in the 1850s in mansions, but these were rather small-scale facilities that produced butter and cheese. The invention of the separator in 1878 provided an important material and technological impetus for the modernisation and expansion of dairy farming, as it enabled the separation of cream from milk efficiently. The separator was introduced into Finnish dairies in the 1880s. In the 1890s, smaller home separators started to become common, improving the quality of homemade butter.¹⁸ In 1901, new legislation enabled the establishment of cooperative dairies and ushered in a period of rapid growth of this new sector of the industry. The aim was to establish larger and more efficient dairies with up-to-date technologies and capabilities to improve the quality of butter as well as cattle husbandry in the area. At the turn of the twentieth century, dairies also started to pasteurise milk and cream in order to make them healthier and less perishable. In general, milk production started to be seen as serious work based on science, instead of being merely part of household chores.¹⁹ The editor of *Maitotalouden lehti* (“The Journal of Dairy husbandry”), for example, pointed out in 1905 that dairy farming had become an object of thorough scientific research and that it should not be a bystander in the scramble for progress and development.²⁰ Internationally, milk as a physical and chemical substance had been an object of scientific research since the late eighteenth century. From this time different methods were employed to determine the constituents of milk and this led to more and more accurate knowledge about the properties of this hitherto mysterious liquid.²¹

As highlighted above, butter was the most important dairy product in terms of finance in late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Finland. Until the beginning of the 1860s, country-style butter was exported. Dairy-produced butter only became more common after this time.²² In the late 1870s, approximately 12 percent of total export revenues in Finland came from butter, which underlines its significance for the country.²³ The most important countries im-

18 Väinö Pessi, *Suomen meijeriteollisuuden vaiheita* (Helsinki, Kirjayhtymä, 1966), 14–26; Matti Peltonen, “Uudet kaupallistumisen muodot,” in *Suomen maatalouden historia II. Kasvun ja kriisien aika 1870-luvulta 1950-luvulle*, ed. by Matti Peltonen (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2004), 99–106.

19 Pessi, *Suomen meijeriteollisuuden vaiheita*, 49–52, 58–64; Kaarlenkaski, “Living Machines,” 36, 51–53.

20 Toim., “Maitotalouden lehti,” *Maitotalouden lehti*, December 29, 1905, 1.

21 Atkins, *Liquid Materialities*, 61–90.

22 Grotenfelt, *Tietoja*, 41.

23 Taina Syrjämaa, “Eläimet, eläinperäiset tuotteet ja edistysusko,” in *Tunteva tuote. Kuinka eläimistä tuli osa teollista tuotantoa?*, ed. by Taija Kaarlenkaski and Otto Latva (Tampere: Vastapaino, 2022), 37.

porting Finnish butter were Russia, Denmark and Britain.²⁴ In 1905, a group of cooperative dairies founded Valio, a cooperative association for exporting butter. By 1911, Valio exported nearly half of the total amount of Finnish butter sold abroad.²⁵ Due to the financial importance of butter, farmers were educated in order to improve the effectiveness and quality of butter production. Newspaper articles and guidebooks highlighted the significance of how to correctly feed cows, as it was explained that this affected the quality and amount of butter. In addition, the need to improve the hygiene of all the dairy production stages was a recurring theme in educational texts. For example, an educational book describing milk handling in the Elanto cooperative association in Helsinki included pictures of different microscopic bacteria that had been found in milk by 1912. The cleanliness of cows, cowsheds, milkers, and milk containers was emphasised.²⁶ Thus, human control over different material beings and objects was increased in order to make milk products safer to consume and more appealing to consumers.

The financial importance of butter also affected attitudes towards margarine production in Finland, which was totally prohibited between 1892 and 1909. Thereafter its production was strictly regulated until the 1950s.²⁷ It was feared that margarine and butter would be mixed and that this would ruin the reputation of Finnish butter in the international market. The aim was to maintain Finland as a “clean country” with regards to the production of margarine. However, there were also other arguments. Fat, for example, was seen as a necessary nutrient in the northern climate. Thus, margarine could provide a cheap source of fat for the population in a poor country. It was suggested that if people in Finland would consume cheap margarine, the quantity of butter, a more expensive product, that could be exported would increase and therefore lead to an increase in profits.²⁸ After 17 years of prohibition, the latter argument prevailed and the first margarine plant was established in Finland in 1911. However, the debate about the merits of butter and margarine production and consumption continued for decades.²⁹

24 Grotenfelt, *Tietoja*, 124.

25 Kari Hokkanen, *Maidon tie. Valio ja osuusmeijerijärjestö 1905–1980* (Helsinki: Kirjayhtymä, 1980), 43–49.

26 Kaarlo Helén, *Maidon käyttö ravintoaineena ja Elannon maitoliike* (Helsinki, Kirjapainosakeyhtiö Sana, 1912), 6–12; see also, Anon., *Osuusmeijerin jäsen!* (Forssa: Forssan kirjapaino, 1921).

27 Timo Kuukasjärvi, “Maidontuottajat ja margariini – onko sula soppu mahdollon” in *Myrkyn kylvää vai puhdasta luontoa. Maaseutu, ympäristö ja historia*, ed. by Kimmo Jalonen (Turku: Suomen historia, Turun yliopisto, 1999), 65–67.

28 Grotenfelt, *Tietoja*, 146–149.

29 Mika Pantzar, “Public Dialogue between Butter and Margarine in Finland 1923–1992,” *Journal of Consumer Studies and Home Economics* 19 (1995): 11–24.

Milk and modernisation

In the early twentieth century, scientific research on nutrition also began to develop in Finland, following trends already underway in Germany, Britain and the United States.³⁰ For example, by the mid-nineteenth century, some of the earliest nutritional researchers had begun to examine the value of milk in the United States. They were astonished by the wide range of nutritional ingredients in milk, and some began to refer to it as a “perfect food,” because it contained, as they understood, in perfect measure, all the ingredients necessary for life.³¹ After the First World War, many governments in Europe and North America started to promote these nutritional findings and emphasised the need for daily milk consumption for both children and adults as a means to create a thriving population.³²

In Finland, many influential scientists in this field also regarded milk as the basis of healthy nutrition. A. I. Virtanen was one such scientist, who later won the Nobel Prize for Chemistry for developing a method – AIV silage – for preserving hay for cattle in the winter. This innovation enhanced milk production in winter by providing nutrient-rich fodder for the cows, thereby enabling the same vitamin content in milk as during summertime. According to Virtanen, this “winter milk” was especially valuable in Finland because milk was an important source of vitamins A and D.³³ Virtanen worked in the Valio laboratories, which had expanded from a butter exporting cooperation to a leading dairy company in Finland, producing cheese and whole milk for the domestic market. In addition to AIV silage, Virtanen developed AIV salt, which significantly enhanced the preservability of butter.³⁴

Virtanen was an enthusiastic spokesperson of milk as a valuable source of nutrition for humans. In the late 1930s, he was a key member in a committee established by the Finnish government that investigated the nutritional state of Finns. According to the study, the nutrition of poor Finns, in particular, was insufficient. They were seen to be especially lacking in vitamin A, and even their calorie consumption was not high enough. As half of the vitamin A consumed by Finns came from milk and butter, Virtanen suggested feeding cows with AIV silage, which also preserved the vitamins in winter and would thereby pass on into their milk. Moreover, he recommended increasing the consumption of butter and whole milk. In

³⁰ Touko Perko, *Mies, liekki ja unelma. Nobelisti A.I. Virtasen elämäntyö* (Helsinki: Otava, 2014), 180–181; Kaija Rautavirta, *Petusta pitsaan. Ruokahuollon järjestelyt kriisiaikojen Suomessa* (Helsinki: Yliopistopaino, 2010), 10–12.

³¹ DuPuis, *Nature's Perfect Food*, 19.

³² Valenze, *Milk*, 7.

³³ Perko, *Mies, liekki ja unelma*, 84–90, 180–181.

³⁴ Hokkanen, *Maidon tie*, 56–58, 64–70.

general, he estimated that the nutrition of Finnish people was satisfactory and even better than in several European countries. Virtanen regarded milk and milk products, as well as grain and potatoes, as being healthier than sugar, wine, meat and margarine.³⁵ In a leaflet published in 1938, he declared that “of all the food-stuffs we use, milk is nearest to perfection,” and that one litre of milk per day, along with butter, bread and potatoes, satisfies all the nutritional needs of the human body. According to Virtanen, it was impossible to nourish people adequately without milk. This was especially the case in Nordic countries.³⁶

In addition to Valio’s influential laboratory, under the leadership of Virtanen, the company also impacted Finnish dairy husbandry by establishing two professional journals: *Karjantuote* (‘Cattle Products’) in 1918, which was aimed at people working in the dairy industry, and *Karjatalous* (‘Cattle Farming’) in 1924, which was directed at dairy farmers. The purpose of the latter journal was to improve cattle tending, feeding and breeding, which were still regarded as inadequate in Finland. Moreover, Valio published dozens of textbooks on cheese making and other dairy questions and organised educational opportunities for both dairy professionals and farmers.³⁷ Advertising was an important aspect in increasing milk consumption. Margarine companies were among the most frequent advertisers in the 1920s. Consequently, dairy companies, with Valio at the fore, also increased their advertising.³⁸

Thus, fresh milk as a drink for all population groups was strongly intertwined with the development of science and technology and the modernisation of society as a whole. Making milk non-perishable and safe to drink required innovations like pasteurisation and equipment to transport it efficiently and to preserve it chilled. Moreover, the urbanisation of societies created markets for milk in towns and cities. Milk was associated with development, progress and modernity.³⁹ As DuPuis has importantly pointed out, the large-scale consumption of fresh milk was only possible through the development of an industrial food system and is a thoroughly modern practice.⁴⁰

35 Perko, *Mies, liekki ja unelma*, 181–187; Artturi I. Virtanen, *Maidon, maitotuotteiden ja munien merkitys ravinnossamme* (Helsinki: Ilmoittajain reklaamitoimisto, 1938), 4.

36 Virtanen, *Maidon, maitotuotteiden ja munien merkitys*, 1.

37 Seppo Simonen, *Valio. Meijerien keskusosuusliike* (Helsinki: Yhteiskirjapaino Osakeyhtiö, 1955), 200–208; Hokkanen, *Maidon tie*, 68–74.

38 Touko Perko, *Valio ja suuri murros* (Helsinki: Otava, 2005), 400–401.

39 Jönsson, *Mjök*, 38–41; Paulina Rytönen, “From Local Champions to Global Players: The Structural Transformation of the Dairy Sector in a Globalization Perspective,” in *From Local Champions to Global Players: Essays on the History of the Dairy Sector*, ed. by Paulina Rytönen et al. (Stockholm: Stockholm University, 2013), 23–26; Martiin, “Swedish Milk, a Swedish Duty,” 219–220, 229.

40 DuPuis, *Nature’s Perfect Food*, 30.

“Continuous and totally unbiased milk and cheese propaganda”

In the 1910s and 1920s, an increasing number of articles in Finnish newspapers and journals emphasised the significance of milk as part of a healthy diet. Many pieces described the demand for increased milk consumption abroad, supported by particular Milk Propaganda Offices that had been established to help disseminate educational material on the benefits of the product to consumers.⁴¹ However, it is important to remember that in the early twentieth century the word “propaganda” in Finnish had neutral connotations and referred to advertising and spreading information on different issues.⁴²

In 1926, Kulutusmaidontuottajain liitto (‘The Federation of Whole Milk Producers’) was established. The federation was founded to supervise the interests of milk producers, as the prices paid for the product had been very low and had been fluctuating, especially in Greater Helsinki. The federation also aimed at improving the quality of milk and advancing the conditions of milk trade and transport. In addition, the federation paid attention to the fact that the amount of milk sent to Helsinki and other population centres in Southern Finland occasionally exceeded consumption, and this surplus had to be processed and sold at a lower price.⁴³ The growth in milk production was also noted in contemporary newspaper articles, and increasing consumption was seen as a solution to the situation.⁴⁴ Thus, one of the most important goals of Kulutusmaidontuottajain liitto was to increase milk consumption by informing consumers about the healthiness of milk and its cheapness compared to other everyday foodstuffs. The federation also started to publish a professional journal entitled *Maito/Mjölök* (‘Milk’), in order to inform its members

⁴¹ See, for example, August Östergren, “Maidon merkitys kansan ravintoaineena,” *Karjantuote*, May 31, 1918, 90–91; Anon., “Maitotalouspropaganda Ruotsissa,” *Karjantuote*, April 30, 1925, 201–204; Anon., “Kiviniemen kotieläinnäyttely,” *Käkisalmen Sanomat*, September 9, 1926, 2; Anon., “Voimakasta propagandaa maitotaloustuotteiden käytön lisäämiseksi Yhdysvalloissa,” *Maaseudun Tulevaisuus*, September 6, 1927, 1–2; Anon., “Juuston y.m. maitotaloustuotteiden tuotanto paljon kohonnut kaikissa maissa,” *Uusi Suomi*, July 13, 1927, 5. On milk promotion associations in different countries in the Global North, see Martiin, “Swedish Milk, a Swedish Duty,” 214–215.

⁴² Louis Clerc, “Propagandaa vai tiedotusta?,” *Historiallinen aikakauskirja* 114 (2016): 4.

⁴³ E. Saura, *Kulutusmaidon tuottajain liitto 1926–1936* (Helsinki: Maalaiskuntien liiton kirjapaino, 1937), 6–7, 12.

⁴⁴ Anon., “Juuston y.m. maitotaloustuotteiden tuotanto,” 5; Anon., “Uusi propaganda-aihe,” *Länsi-Suomi*, March 27, 1927, 2. A similar situation was also discussed in other countries, such as Sweden, Norway and the United States; see Martiin, “Swedish Milk, a Swedish Duty,” 215, 228; Lyngø, “The National Nutrition Exhibition,” 151; DuPuis, *Nature’s Perfect Food*, 114.

about its activities.⁴⁵ An article on the need for “continuous and totally unbiased milk and cheese propaganda” in Finland appeared in the very first issue of the journal.⁴⁶ To increase milk consumption and raise awareness about the healthiness of milk, the federation published several editions of *Kodin maitokirja/Hemmets mjölkbok* (“The Milk Book for Homes”) in 1928 and 1929, which was aimed at housewives. Moreover, the first Finnish poster advertising milk products was printed in 1928, stating “milk is the source of our health.”⁴⁷



Figures 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3: Finnish milk promotional posters. The poster on the left, from 1928, states “milk is the source of our health.” The poster in the middle declares “Only genuine cream is served here” and the one on the right “More milk.”. Photos by Katariina Pehkonen. Helsinki University Museum Flame.

In 1930, Kulutusmaidontuottajain liitto and Helsingin Maidontarkastusyhdistys (“The Association of Milk Examination in Helsinki”) founded Suomen Maitopropagandatoimisto (“The Finnish Milk Propaganda Office”).⁴⁸ A similar association had been established in Sweden in 1923, and there were similar organisations in other Northern and Central European countries, as well as in North America at the time. According to Håkan Jönsson, the promotion of dairy products was politically uncontroversial in Scandinavia, because the agrarian movement benefited from increased milk consumption. Moreover, the Social Democrats endorsed free school milk as a significant

45 Anon., “Lukijalle,” *Maito*, January 1, 1927, 3. As the official languages of Finland are Finnish and Swedish, the journal as well as many other publications of the federation was published in both languages.

46 Anon., “Maito- ja juustopropagandatyö,” *Maito*, January 1, 1927, 8.

47 Saura, *Kulutusmaidon tuottajain liitto*, 24–25.

48 Saura, *Kulutusmaidon tuottajain liitto*, 25.

element in their advancement of social policy. This mutual understanding made collaboration in coalition governments easier in the 1930s.⁴⁹ The newspaper of the Social Democrats in Finland also promoted milk consumption in cities and towns.⁵⁰ Thus, the widely accepted wholesomeness of milk could be seen as a lubricant in the negotiations of political parties that often had opposing interests.

The central aim of the Milk Propaganda Office was to promote milk and dairy products instead of margarine and different milk-product substitutes, such as artificial cream that had captured markets through effective advertising campaigns in the 1910s and 1920s. Moreover, the increased consumption of coffee, beer and other malted drinks, as well as different soft drinks caused concern and milk was presented as a healthier option to these drinks.⁵¹ To achieve these aims the office published and disseminated posters, postcards, leaflets and books. For example, 250,000 copies of *Kodin maitokirja* were distributed.⁵² This 32-page booklet included articles about the health benefits of milk, advice on milk handling, information on milk use in different countries and cooking recipes for milk-based dishes. For example, milk was presented as one of the cheapest foodstuffs in relation to calorie content.⁵³ In addition, the office produced lectures that were broadcast by the Finnish Broadcasting Company and sent articles written by doctors and nutrition experts to newspapers. The office was funded by the Federation of Whole Milk Producers, The Association of Milk Examination in Helsinki, as well as the Finnish state, whose stake was approximately seven percent in terms of overall funding.⁵⁴

Moreover, The Milk Propaganda Office participated in agricultural and nutrition exhibitions, showing posters and statistical tables, distributing leaflets and postcards and organising lectures.⁵⁵ It also organised “milk weeks” and “milk days”

49 Jönsson, *Mjölk*, 32–35. See also DuPuis, *Nature's Perfect Food*, 113–121; Lyngø, “The National Nutrition Exhibition,” 145, 158; Martiin, “Swedish Milk, a Swedish Duty,” 214–215; Henrik Meinander, *A History of Finland*, trans. Tom Geddes (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 182–183.

50 Anon., “Maidon käyttöä ravintotaloudessa olisi lisättävä,” *Suomen Sosialidemokraatti*, December 24, 1927, 1, 5.

51 See, for example, E. Saura, “Mainonta ja maitomyymälöitten ikkunat,” *Maito*, January 1, 1931, 12–14; Kokko, “Maitotuotteiden mainostus,” *Maaseudun Tulevaisuus*, August 2, 1932, 3–4.

52 Saura, *Kulutusmaidon tuottajain liitto*, 25–28. The activities of the Swedish sister organisation were rather similar. See Jönsson, *Mjölk*, 32–37; Martiin, “Swedish Milk, a Swedish Duty,” 224–227.

53 Tigerstedt et al., *Kodin maitokirja* (Kulutusmaidontuottajain liitto, 1928); Tigerstedt et al., *Kodin maitokirja. Pohjois-Savon ja Pohjois-Karjalan numero* (Kulutusmaidontuottajain liitto, 1929). For similar arguments on the cheapness of milk, see Helén, *Maidon käyttö ravintoaineena*, 5; Osmo Turpeinen, *Maito on paras ruoka-aineemme!* (Helsinki: Kenraali Mannerheimin lastensuojeluliitto, 1938), 7.

54 Saura, *Kulutusmaidon tuottajain liitto*, 25–28.

55 Anon., “Maitopropagandatoimisto työskentelee pula-ajasta huolimatta määrätietoisesti,” *Ajan suunta*, January 19, 1933, 3; Anon., “Kulutusmaidontuottajain liitto ja Suomen maitopropagandatoimisto elintarvikemessuilla,” *Maaseudun Tulevaisuus*, November 1, 1932, 5.

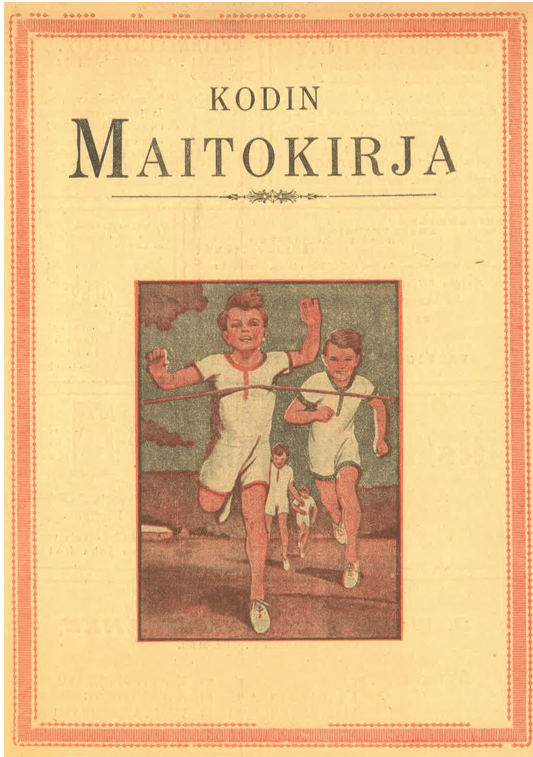


Figure 2.4: The cover of *Kodin maitokirja*. Another version of the book cover included a heading stating: “A healthy soul in a healthy body. To stay healthy, consume enough milk in your diet!”.

around the country. For example, in Helsinki, milk days in 1936 and 1937 were arranged in cooperation with several other organisations, and they included lectures and exhibitions, and discussions and talks were broadcast on the radio. Leaflets promoting milk were distributed in schools, and trucks carrying giant milk glasses drove around the city. Milk-based dishes were on display, accompanied with posters showing their nutritional value and price.⁵⁶ In both 1936 and 1937, Professor A. I. Virtanen delivered a lecture entitled “Milk as Quality Nutrition and a Source of Vitamins.” Milk days were especially directed at housewives in order to give them

⁵⁶ Anon., “Valistustoiminta maitotaloustuotteiden kulutuksen tehostamiseksi,” *Maito*, January 1, 1937, 18; Anon., “Maitopäivät Helsingissä t.k. 29–30 p:nä,” *Helsingin Sanomat*, March 22, 1936, 17; Anon., “Maitopäivien avajaiset pidettiin Säätytalossa,” *Helsingin Sanomat*, March 30, 1936, 6.

information on the significance of milk as nutrition.⁵⁷ Between 1936 and 1939, a large number of smaller scale milk days were organised throughout the country. These events were mainly organised by the Martha Organisation, a Finnish home economics organisation, founded in 1899. The organisation aimed to modernise and rationalise housework by applying the principles of domestic science. The focus was on efficiency and the modification of eating habits to ensure a healthier diet and to maximise the economic rationality of housekeeping. Following the model of Helsinki milk days, the local smaller events also included lectures delivered by dairy professionals and teachers of home economics, as well as practical demonstrations on milk handling and how to cook milk-based dishes.⁵⁸ It may be assumed that through these grass roots level milk days, the message of milk promotion was spread efficiently to the Finnish people.

In several newspaper and journal articles and leaflets, high milk consumption was connected with civilisation, and countries promoting milk were presented as civilised countries.⁵⁹ Naturally, Finland wanted to be among these countries. In some newspaper articles, the high milk consumption rates in Finland were commented upon with a sense of national pride.⁶⁰ Regarding nationalism, it is remarkable that most of the children depicted in the milk propaganda posters were blonde. Similar imagery was also typical in educational leaflets. Furthermore, the white colour of milk is often emphasised and reflected in the pictures. For example, the cover of *Kodin maitokirja* featured athletic children in white clothes. As Jönsson has pointed out, the whiteness of milk is often symbolically extended to its drinkers, referring to purity, modernity and progress (see Figures 2.2, 2.3 and 2.4 above).⁶¹ It also seems that milk was seen as an important factor at the state level in raising the nutritional state of the Finnish people. According to a newspaper report, the Minis-

57 Anon., "Maitopäivät Helsingissä ensi sunnuntaina ja maanantaina," *Helsingin Sanomat*, March 28, 1936, 9; Anon., "Valistustoiminta," 18.

58 See, for example, Anon., "Oulun Marttayhdistyksen kokous," *Kaiku*, September 11, 1936, 2; Anon., "Maitojuhlia," *Eteenpäin*, October 21, 1937, 3; Anon., "Maitopäivät Mäntylahdessa," *Savo*, November 1, 1938, 4; Anon., "Marttatoimintaa Ruukissa," *Liitto*, November 12, 1938: 4; Anne Ollila, *Suomen kotien päivä valkenee . . . Marttajärjestö suomalaisessa yhteiskunnassa vuoteen 1939* (Helsinki: Suomen Historiallinen Seura, 1993), 104–127, 340–341.

59 Anon., "Propagandatyö maitotaloustuotteiden menekin turvaamiseksi kaippaa voimakkaampaa tukea karjanomistajapiirien taholta," *Maaseudun Tulevaisuus*, July 16, 1932, 1; Tigerstedt et al., *Kodin maitokirja. Pohjois-Savon ja Pohjois-Karjalan numero*, 17.

60 See, for example, E. Saura, "Hyvä maito – ihmisen paras ravinto," *Maaseudun Tulevaisuus*, December 14, 1935, 6; Anon., "Kiviniemen kotieläinnäyttely," 2. On the national significance of milk consumption in Sweden, see Martiin, "Swedish Milk, a Swedish Duty," 227–228. Also see Dirke in the present volume.

61 Jönsson, *Mjök*, 39–40.

ter of Social Affairs gave a talk on milk days in Helsinki in 1936 in which he referred to the connection between inadequate nutrition and low fertility and several diseases. According to him, milk consumption should be increased “in the name of the health and wellbeing of our people.”⁶²

Milk consumption in Finland, however, was already high compared to many other countries in the early twentieth century.⁶³ In 1912, it was estimated that approximately 300 kilos of milk was consumed per person in a year in Helsinki. This was significantly more than in many European cities, such as Berlin (117 litres per year), Munich (135 litres) or Zurich (153 litres). Only in Stockholm did people consume nearly as much as in Helsinki (270 litres).⁶⁴ Finnish food historians have also pointed out that milk was commonly consumed with meals in the 1920s and 1930s, especially in the countryside. Indeed, foreign visitors in the 1930s wondered at Finnish adults drinking milk.⁶⁵ In 1932, the secretary of the Pellervo Society,⁶⁶ Ilmari Rahola, stated that increased milk consumption was no longer necessary from a physiological perspective. Similarly, the managing director of Valio, Antti Parviala, pointed out four years later that possibilities to raise milk consumption were scarce as it was already at a higher level than in neighbouring countries. He estimated that people in Finland consumed 0.68 litres of milk per day, whereas in Oslo and Copenhagen the amount was 0.4 litres and in Stockholm it was 0.4 to 0.5 litres.⁶⁷ However, it was often mentioned that one litre of whole milk per person per day was the optimum. Hence there was still room for an increase in consumption among the Finnish population.⁶⁸ According to Rahola and Parviala, the reason for high milk consumption was the low consumer price of milk: in Finland milk was sold at half the price as in Sweden. However, both were of the opinion that it was still possible to increase the consumption of butter and cheese and thus find new markets for milk products.⁶⁹

62 Anon., “Maitopäivien avajaiset,” 5.

63 The lack of worldwide statistics from the early twentieth century makes it difficult to present precise levels of consumption. Thus, estimates found from different sources are used.

64 Helén, *Maidon käyttö ravintoaineena*, 13.

65 Sillanpää, *Makeasta happamaan*, 63; Kylli, *Suomen ruokahistoria*, 235.

66 An organisation promoting the cooperative system in Finland.

67 Ilmari Rahola, “Kotimaisten maataloustuotteiden mainostus,” *Suomen osuustoimintalehti*, May 1, 1932, 222; Anon., “Maitopropaganda tuottanut hyviä tuloksia,” *Turun Sanomat*, July 9, 1936, 5.

68 See, for example, Virtanen, *Maidon, maitotuotteiden ja munien merkitys*, 8. The same aim was set in Norway. See Lyngø, “The National Nutrition Exhibition,” 151. In the United States, the recommendation in the 1930s was approximately the same: one quart (0.94625 litres) for children and one pint (0.473 litres) for adults. See DuPuis, *Nature's Perfect Food*, 112.

69 Rahola, “Kotimaisten,” 222; Anon., “Maitopropaganda,” 5.

From 1935, the state granted money to the Pellervo Society to start advertising domestic animal-based products to increase their consumption. Moreover, it established Kotieläintuotteiden mainostoimikunta ('The Advertisement Committee of Domestic Animal Products') to lead these activities. Consequently, the funding for the Milk Propaganda Office was stopped. At first, the committee focused on the advertisement of poultry, pork and reindeer products, because the consumption of milk products was already high. In the late 1930s, the committee continued the promotion of milk products in a similar manner as had been carried out by the Milk Propaganda Office. This understandably fostered bitterness at the Federation of Whole Milk Producers.⁷⁰

However, the Federation of Whole Milk Producers and the Advertisement Committee of Domestic Animal Products collaborated in the production of two milk promotional films.⁷¹ *Maito – terveytemme lähde* ('Milk – A Source of our Health') and *Matin maitohuolet* ('Matti's Milk Worries') were both completed in 1938. The former, in particular, summarised the main arguments of milk promotion of the time. Milk was presented as a foodstuff that includes all the necessary nutrients in an easily digestible form. To illustrate the point, milk was contrasted with coffee, another favourite drink of Finns, which does not contain any energy nor nutrients. Coffee was regarded as being especially harmful for children, and milk was represented as a healthier option, making children strong and thriving. Moreover, the cleanliness and high hygienic standards of Finnish milk production were underlined. *Maito – terveytemme lähde* was apparently directed at consumers, as it declared the high quality and healthiness of Finnish milk. In contrast, *Matin maitohuolet* was addressed to farmers and also showed the unfavourable sides of cattle husbandry. In the film, a backward dairy farm and its undeveloped practices were shown, followed by a model farm with exemplary procedures. Importantly, these films also displayed the animals that were essential for milk production: cows were depicted grazing and being milked, and horses were shown pulling carts filled with milk churns. In addition to these films, Valio financed educational films with similar content, such as *Syö enemmän juustoa* ('Eat More Cheese') (1936), which showed the process of cheese making in detail and emphasised the nutritional value of the dairy product. As regards the Milk Propaganda Office, it was forced to end its activities in

70 Anon., "Maatalousministeriö on asettanut 425,000 mk Pellervo-seuran käytettäväksi kotieläintuotteiden mainostamiseen," *Karjalalous*, February 8, 1935, 98; Anon., "Kulutusmaidontuottajain toiminta v. 1938," *Maito*, January 1, 1939, 16–17; I.A.R., "Kotieläintuotteiden mainostoiminta," *Etelä-Saimaa*, April 2, 1938, 1.

71 Anon., "Kulutusmaidontuottajain toiminta," 17.

1938 due to a lack of funding.⁷² Apparently, the Second World War also stopped the operations of the Advertisement Committee of Domestic Animal Products.

Conclusion

Establishing milk as an essential part of a healthy diet for everyone started in Finland in the early twentieth century, following an example begun in Northern European countries and the United States. Thus, drinking milk extensively is not a traditional custom in Finland, but rather a modern practice connected to the development of science, technology and urbanisation. As a result of these tendencies, formerly unpredictable material beings, such as bacteria, could be increasingly controlled by novel inventions and technologies that enabled milk preservation and transportation. However, as dairy husbandry had traditionally held significance in agrarian culture, the consumption of milk products was not unfamiliar to Finns. Furthermore, butter was already a highly appreciated foodstuff. These issues may have had an effect regarding the acceptance of widespread milk drinking. In the early twentieth century, increasing milk consumption was seen as a solution to solving the nutritional deficit of the impoverished part of the population. The rise in the consumption of milk may also be seen as part of the international trend of increased consumption of animal origin proteins, which has often been connected to the growth of people's income.⁷³ In Finland, between the world wars, the economy grew rapidly and in 1938, the GDP per capita reached the same level as in France and the Netherlands. Hence, a growing number of people could afford to consume animal-based products in their everyday life. At the same time, more than 50 percent of Finnish people still earned their living from agriculture and forestry, and consequently most of the population had easy access to fresh milk in the countryside.⁷⁴ For the primary milk producers, cows, the increase in milk consumption and the modernisation of cattle husbandry entailed higher requirements for milk yield, but also better feeding, as well as cleaner and lighter

72 Anon., "Kulutusmaidontuottajain toiminta," 16–17.

73 See, for example, Nicolau-Nos, Pujol-Andreu, and Hernández, "Milk, Social Acceptance of a New Food in Europe," 126.

74 See Meinander, *A History of Finland*, 184, 186.

living conditions. Through more effective breeding and feeding the bodies of the cows also started to change, making higher milk yields possible.⁷⁵

In addition to the changing material circumstances that enabled increase in milk production and consumption, the appreciation of milk was discursively intertwined with civilisation and nationality. By increasing milk consumption, Finland could join the group of civilised Western countries, which was probably enticing for a state that had recently declared independence from Russia. Combining milk with health, wellbeing and strength in the promotional materials contributed to the project of nation building in a relatively new state. Moreover, the increase in milk consumption enhanced methods of cattle husbandry and the entire dairy industry as a whole. Furthermore, the role of the distinguished scientist A. I. Virtanen, the head of the Valio laboratories, should not be underestimated. His work in the development of cattle feeding, preserving milk products, as well as the exploration of the nutritional state of Finnish people was significant in itself. Yet, in addition to this he was also a devoted spokesperson for milk. It must also be remembered that the intensification of cattle husbandry led to an increasing amount of milk that had to be sold to consumers. This was another important factor behind the vigorous promotion of milk. As Inger Johanne Lyngø has pointed out, milk joined the interests of agriculture with novel scientific knowledge as well as the pursuits of agricultural and social policies.⁷⁶ It may be argued that solid ground for Finland's position at the top of the world's milk consumption statistics was established in the 1920s and 1930s.

⁷⁵ See Kaarlenkaski, "Living Machines," 51–53.

⁷⁶ Lyngø, "The National Nutrition Exhibition," 151.

