

# Changes and Challenges

*A Century of Utah Agriculture*



## The Cox and Gossner Family Histories

### Materials

- ◆ Changes and Challenges CD, and necessary projection equipment
- ◆ Gossner Story Program (on Same CD as Changes & Challenges)
- ◆ Color transparency's or color copies of Alton Utah map
- ◆ Family History Worksheet
- ◆ Gossner Cheese (*optional*)

**Time:** 45 minutes

### Standard 1

Students will understand the interaction between Utah's geography and its inhabitants.

### Background

#### Cox Family Story Narrative, Slides 1-4

On the first of July 1911, 33-year-old William M. Cox drove a sheep wagon with his 22-year-old wife Eliza Olive onto their new farm. With them were their daughters; Zola 4, Lila 1, and baby Etna. They settled on a lot in the small town of Alton, Kane County, Utah. They called their new home "Oak Grove Farm." On their arrival Will and Eliza set up housekeeping in a tent under some large oak trees on the property; later they built a small frame house. Will made a living by surveying and herding sheep. Will and Eliza eventually had a total of 11 children, 10 of whom lived to adulthood.

The Coxes started their farm during one of the great growth periods of Utah agriculture. How did agriculture in Utah change during the years their family was being raised? What did these changes mean for the Cox family? Think about these questions as you learn about The Cox Family of Alton, Utah.

The Cox family in Alton, Utah, was an example of the optimism young families had for farming and ranching in Utah in the early 1900s. They raised sheep for cash money, herding hundreds of them each summer in the rugged canyon lands of Kane County. William Cox also did surveying work. The family had some dry farm acreage to raise wheat for flour and to raise other grains to feed their animals during the winter. The Coxes also grew potatoes, onions, sweet corn, squash, peas, beans, raspberries, and carrots in their garden for food. They raised chickens for meat and eggs and sold any extra eggs to stores in nearby towns. Before the 1920s the Cox family even had water piped to their property and could use a pay telephone in town.

The economic crises of the 1920s and 30s had less effect on the Cox family living in remote southern Utah than on many others. The family did become ill during the Spanish influenza epidemic of

### Objectives

1. Investigate the relationship between physical geography and Utah's settlement, land use, and economy.
2. Examine the interrelationship between Utah's climate, location, landforms, and life.
3. Assess how natural resources sustain and enhance people's lives.
4. Examine how people affect the geography of Utah.

### Standard 4

Students will understand the diverse ways people make a living in Utah.

### Objective

4. Investigate the past and present role of agriculture in Utah.

1919, though none died from the disease. In 1928, and again in 1933, William Cox was actually able to acquire more federal lands through homestead claims. In 1929 the Cox family bought a milk separator to separate the cream from their milk. They then sold the surplus milk. This was the only money the family had during these difficult times, except when they sold an animal or Will Cox did some surveying work. In 1934 Will bought the family's first car, a used 1927 coupe. In 1935 Allen Cox, the oldest boy, went to work with the Civilian Conservation Corp. He later said that this was the first time in his life he had ten dollars in his pocket.

William M. Cox died in September 1943. He is buried in the Alton Cemetery. His wife Eliza Olive did not want to face winter alone on the farm and moved to St. George, Utah. The next summer she sold Oak Grove Farm to her son Allen and moved to nearby Orderville, where she and her husband had always hoped to retire since it was Will's birthplace. Eliza Olive died in Orem, Utah in November 1975. After she died her family took her body to Alton and buried her next to her husband. In about 1950 Allen Cox sold the farm to the Heaton Livestock Company. This was a fitting end, since William Cox had purchased the family's first lot from Jonathan Heaton.

The Cox family saw Utah agriculture go from boom to bust to boom again in their years on their farm in Utah. At Williams' death his wife Olive sold the farm. If your Grandfather or Grandmother owned a farm in Utah today and passed away would you sell their farm? If you would, why, and to whom would you sell it? If not, why not, and what would you do with it?

### **Gossner Family Story (The Gossner history program)**

Edwin Gossner Sr. was born in 1909. He came from the eastern region of Edliswiel-Waldkirch, Switzerland where five generations of his family had lived as farmers. Today, the seventh generation of Gossners carry on the family tradition and continue to maintain the same homestead that has been a part of the family heritage for all these years.

Due to a declining European economy and limited prospects for the future, Edwin Gossner decided to seek a new life in America. He immigrated to the United States in 1930, scarcely speaking a word of English, and immediately went to work for his older brother Ernest in Wisconsin. Ernest had preceded Edwin seven years earlier to the U.S. after graduating from the Swiss Cheesemaking School of Switzerland and now owned his own cheese factory. For the next three years Edwin Gossner served his own apprenticeship and learned the art making fine Swiss cheese following the traditional methods of the old



*Eliza and William Cox  
circa 1937*



*Edwin Gossner  
circa 1935*

country. In 1933 Edwin married Josephine Oechslin of Darlington, Wisconsin and she was to be a major influence on him all their married life. Two children, Edwin, Jr. and Dolores, soon followed.

It was also in 1933 that his brother got an offer elsewhere and Edwin was asked to take over as Cheesemaker at the Burke factory. He held this position until 1937 when the factory burned down. Edwin then moved on to California where he accepted a position with the Rumi-ano family making cheese. While there he converted the plant from a Monterey Jack to a Swiss cheese facility. This was to be an invaluable experience as he was able to improve upon his knowledge of making Swiss cheese utilizing milk from cows fed on fermented feeds (silage) instead of fresh feed. The traditional method of making Swiss cheese did not allow for the use of milk from cows fed on silage, but he proved that it could be done. This was an important new concept that Gossner would later successfully employ in Cache Valley.

In the ensuing years Gossner was the guiding force in upgrading Cache Valley milk production to Grade A market status. He brought sustained benefits to the dairymen by opening new markets for them and increasing their overall profits. Gossner also made important innovations such as introducing to the area the means of making processed cheese and a more efficient recovery method of whey by-products.

In 1966 Edwin Gossner and his family began anew by starting Gossner Foods. Again the focus was placed on making Swiss cheese. They started with a half vat of milk (12,500 lbs.) every other day and Ed was quoted as saying that he would be happy if he could make up to two vats (50,000 lbs.) every other day. Today, over 25 years later, Gossner Foods uses over a half million pounds of milk a day for cheese production. In 1967 Gossners began packaging a line of cheeses starting with Swiss, Cheddar and Monterey Jack. Eventually Muenster and others were added so that in time over 30 varieties carried the Gossner name.

Edwin Gossner had his eye on the future. In 1973 he helped establish Swiss Village, a cheese manufacturing plant in Nampa, Idaho and in 1982 he brought out a new fluid milk product that utilized ultra high temperature packaging technology. Rather than compete with the existing Grade A milk market this new technology allowed Gossners to open up new marketing avenues. Gossner Milk can be kept unrefrigerated at room temperature for months and as such has proved to be highly desirable to the military community and others. Today, Gossner Milk travels all over the world with our troops, and it is sold in places as diverse as Puerto Rico and Panama where milk supplies and refrigeration are limited.

The mainstay of Gossner Foods continues to be Swiss cheese. It is made using the same formula that Edwin Gossner developed years ago. The Gossner Swiss cheese is a specialty cheese that has a



*Edwin Gossner  
circa 1955*

milder flavor and softer body than other Swiss cheeses, yet it remains distinctly Swiss. Gossner Foods now utilizes state-of-the-art equipment for aseptic packaging and cheesemaking and is currently exploring new ideas to expand its product line.

When Edwin Gossner died in 1987 he left behind as part of his legacy a well-oiled machine that consisted of a corps of caring, knowledgeable, and well-trained employees. It is duly noted that were it not for these dedicated people Gossner Foods would not be what it is today, a successful family business.

Three of the original four members of the Gossner family that came to the Valley in 1941 are no longer with us. During their lifetimes, Edwin, Josephine, and Edwin Jr. were greatly respected in the community and received numerous civic awards in recognition of their involvement and contributions. That tradition of service to the community continues to this day at Gossner's.

### **Procedures**

View slides 1-4 of the Cox Story. With your students review the questions asked and visit the recommended links. If you have access to a computer lab with Internet connections, you could ask the students to view the story section "The Cox Family" slides individually or in groups of two. The Cox family history covers the first part of the 20th century (1910-1950). For comparison, and to put Utah history in perspective, ask students to view (or show to the entire class with a projector) the history of the Gossner family of Cache Valley. This family began working in Utah agriculture during the second part of the 20th century (1948-present).

Students should be able to complete the attached worksheet (the slide questions are asked here again) and determine the historical events that affected each family (this will help to assess their knowledge about Utah chronological historical events) and the similar events each family encountered.

As an additional activity, offer students a taste of Gossner brand cheese—cheese made from the milk of Cache Valley cows and processed in Logan. If you are not able to find Gossner cheese in your local store, contact Utah Agriculture in the Classroom, we'll have some sent to you.



4. If your Grandfather or Grandmother owned a farm in Utah today and passed away would you sell their farm? If you would, why, and to whom would you sell it? If not, why not, and what would you do with it?

5. Determine the historical events that affected each family by placing a “C” for the Cox family and a “G” for the Gossner family next to each event the family would have encountered. If both families were affected by the event, place a C and G on the space provided.

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| _____ Traveled by car to new farm location.               | _____ Herded sheep.  |
| _____ Farmed during WWII.                                 | _____ Sold milk to troops overseas.                                |
| _____ Purchased their family’s first car in 1935.         | _____ Had a garden.  |
| _____ Acquired land through homestead claims.             | _____ Sold products out of state.                                  |
| _____ Farmed with livestock but also had other income.    | _____ Passed the farm business down to other family members.       |
| _____ Family took a summer vacation.                      | _____ Had a larger family.   |
| _____ Farmed for self-sufficiency.                        | _____ Employed more than family members.                           |
| _____ Owned cows and sold milk.                           | _____ Milked cows by hand.   |
| _____ Had a variety of farm animals.                      | _____ EPA rules effected this family.                              |
| _____ Started two cheese companies.                       | _____ Lived in a tent for a short time.                            |
| _____ Lived in a region where the population was growing. | _____ Operated their Utah farm during the depression of the 1930s. |