



What You Need to Know About Dairy Farming

While no two farms look the same, the dairy farmers who own and operate the farms all share the same goals: providing outstanding care to their animals; being good stewards of the land; and making positive contributions to their communities. Farmers are dedicated to providing you with safe, high-quality, nutritious milk and dairy foods. Below are answers to frequently asked questions about milk's journey from the cow to you.



ON-FARM PRACTICES

Question: How do dairy farmers care for their cows?

Answer: Dairy farmers know that their cows must be healthy and well-cared for to produce pure, wholesome milk. They constantly seek ways to improve the comfort and health of their animals by providing a nutritious diet, comfortable living conditions and good medical care. Cows are the lifeblood of every dairy farmer's business, and taking good care of them is paramount to the farm's success.

Question: Why are some cows kept indoors in barns?

Answer: Farmers provide cows with safe, comfortable and clean barns to keep their herd healthy. Many modern dairy farms house their animals in a climate-controlled free stall barn to protect cows from harsh weather. Cows eat and sleep whenever and wherever they choose in a free stall barn, which is furnished with bedding material. Barns contain a ventilation system to supply fresh air; some use fans and sprinklers to cool cows. Wherever housed, dairy cows always have access to nutritious food and fresh, clean water.

Question: What do dairy farmers do to ensure safe milk?

Answer: Dairy farmers are committed to protecting the quality and safety of the milk they produce. Milk and dairy products are among the most highly regulated foods available, undergoing up to 17 government-required or voluntary industry safety checks from farm to fridge. If it's not perfect, it's pitched.

Question: How is milk collected from a cow?

Answer: Two to three times a day, 365 days of the year, dairy farmers spend several hours milking their cows. Each cow's udder is cleaned and dried before an automatic milking machine gently massages the milk from the cow, a process that takes 3 to 5 minutes per cow. Milk flows directly from the cow through sanitized equipment into a refrigerated tank, where it is chilled between 35° F to 40° F. It is transported to a processing plant within 48 hours and is tested for overall quality and safety. Milk is pasteurized, or heated, to destroy any harmful microorganisms that may exist. It is then bottled or made into a variety of dairy foods, having never been touched by human hands during the entire process.

ENVIRONMENTAL CARE



Question: What do dairy farmers do to protect the environment?

Answer: Dairy farmers live and work on their farms, so it's important for them to protect the land, water and air for their families, their neighbors and future generations. By following recommended conservation practices, farmers maximize crop yields while minimizing impact to their land and the environment. They minimize the use of water in their milking parlors, properly store dairy waste, and recycle water and manure.

Question: What do farms do with manure?

Answer: All dairy farms must meet state and federal standards for manure storage, handling and recycling per guidelines from state and federal agencies. Dairy farmers recycle manure according to detailed nutrient management plans that help conserve soil and water resources. Some farms use technology, like methane digesters, to reduce manure odor and generate energy to power their farms.

FAMILY FARMS

Question: Why are dairy farms getting bigger?

Answer: Although dairy farms have grown in size, the family farm is alive and well across rural America. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), 98 percent of U.S. dairy farms are family owned and operated, sometimes by multiple generations of the family. Like other business owners, dairy farmers modernize their businesses to improve overall efficiency. These steps allow them to continue to support their families and provide consumers with high-quality and affordable dairy products. Dairy farms grow in size to:

- Support a son, daughter or other relative who wants to join the family business.
- Improve overall farm efficiency and to cover ever-increasing input costs, such as feed, fuel, equipment and labor.

Some family dairies use an "incorporated" business structure for tax purposes and/or because they are owned by more than one family member. Regardless of the farm's size, dairy farmers remain committed to taking care of the land where they live and work, protecting the air and water they share with neighbors, and providing the best care for their cows.

Question: Where can I go for more information about milk and dairy farming?

Answer: For more information about life on a dairy farm, visit dairyfarmingtoday.org. For additional nutritional information, check out dairyspot.com and nationaldairycouncil.org.

Mid-Atlantic Dairy Association

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