



TEXAS ASSOCIATION OF DAIRYMEN

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HOLIDAYS A TIME FOR THANKS AND CELEBRATION

By John Cowan

As you gather with family around a food-laden table this holiday season, take a moment to think about who brought you the food you enjoy not only for the holiday feast, but year-round.

Thanks to our nation's farm families, most of us have plenty to eat. We also have access to a wide variety of foods at relatively affordable prices. That isn't the case in all parts of our world, unfortunately.

On behalf of the dairy industry, the Texas Association of Dairymen wishes to say "thank you" as 2004 draws to a close. We'd like to thank the consumers who support our industry by buying milk, cheese, ice cream and other dairy products.

But TAD also would like to thank its members, the dairy farmers who work so hard to supply the butter for the dinner rolls, the scoop of ice cream for the pecan pie and the milk put out for Santa to enjoy with his cookies.

In Texas, about 800 dairy farmers in the state produce more than 656 million gallons of milk a year, ranking Texas 12th in milk production nationwide. Those same producers (and their cows) also help make Texas the fourth leading producer of ice cream in the country.

These dairy products – as well as other food and fiber products – are produced largely through the labor of individual farmers and their families. Farming in Texas isn't a corporate endeavor – an estimated 92 percent of Texas' agricultural operations are still run by individuals or families.

These families make a lot of personal sacrifices to stock the nation's grocery store shelves. Farming is not an easy profession. Those whose only exposure to the farm life is through television or the movies are getting the Norman Rockwell, romantic view of this existence.

The reality is tough work, plenty of dirt, early mornings, late nights, financial worries, the rising cost of feed and equipment, broken machinery, sick cows, keeping up with ever-changing rules regulating the industry, and countless other concerns. Yet these families wouldn't choose any other way of life.

Farming in the 21st century will present even more new challenges and demands. The Texas Association of Dairymen will continue its mission to support and assist our state's dairy farmers so that they can continue to pursue a way of life they love and to put food on Texas tables.

Happy holidays!

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John Cowan is the executive director of the Texas Association of Dairymen, Inc. (www.milk4texas.org).

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