



Texas Association of Dairymen

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FOOD SAFETY IS TOP PRIORITY FOR DAIRY PRODUCERS

By John Cowan

Our country has the safest food supply in the world, but in recent weeks some consumers have become alarmed after a number of food products have been pulled from grocery store shelves because of health concerns.

In the wake of these reports, dairymen want to reassure consumers that they do not have to worry about the safety of Texas-produced milk and other dairy products.

Milk and dairy products are among the safest and most highly regulated foods available to consumers. Dairy farms and processing plants must meet stringent safety requirements and are inspected regularly by federal, state and local officials.

But work to ensure a safe dairy supply begins with the dairy farmer, who takes extremely seriously his responsibility to provide a safe and secure food supply.

Farmers desire to do their job well. But the herd and the farm are also a significant investment and a source of livelihood. Therefore, farmers want to make sure their herd is healthy and their product is safe and of the highest quality.

Milk safety starts with the cow herself. State importation rules guard against the outbreak of tuberculosis and other diseases on the farm. Strict standards govern how the herd is housed and what it's fed.

The herd receives regular medical care, including periodic check-ups, vaccinations and treatment by trained veterinarians. Illnesses or other problems are quickly diagnosed and addressed before other cows are affected or the food supply is compromised.

Vigilance continues in the milking barn, which must meet strict sanitation standards and pass regular health inspections. A cow's udder is disinfected prior to each time she is milked, and milking equipment is thoroughly cleaned both before and after each use. The milk is taken directly from the cow and placed into a refrigerated holding tank to preserve both freshness and ensure its safety.

From the time the milk leaves the cow until it is finally bottled, the milk undergoes pasteurization and other processes designed to kill bacteria and protect quality. It is repeatedly and rigorously tested and monitored.

While most food safety measures have been in place for years, farmers now also focus on the security of the milk supply.

Since the events of Sept. 11, 2001, the dairy industry has been working closely with government agencies, including the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, to safeguard the milk supply from a variety of possible threats.

The industry has adopted measures to secure both the milk supply and the processing facilities. And on the farm, dairy producers are more vigilant than ever about monitoring access to the farm, its facilities and the herd.

Milk and dairy products have been a vital part of the American diet for generations. And generations of dairy farmers have made sure the food they produce is both healthy and safe. Today's dairy farmers, more than ever, are committed to continuing that tradition.

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