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During National Dairy Month, reconnect with the simple pleasure of milk

By Darren Turley
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A long, tough regular legislative session recently ended at the Texas Capitol, just in time for the summer heat. As the Texas Association of Dairymen walked the hallways, met with legislators and sat in committee meetings into the night, it was easy to get entangled in the intricacies of public policy that impact our state's dairy producers and affect how that jug of milk makes it to grocery store shelves across the state.

Visiting the Capitol cafeteria for a bottle of milk or a bowl of frozen yogurt not only was a much-needed afternoon refresher, but also a reminder of what all the hustle and bustle was about – making sure that one of nature's simplest creations, milk, would remain available and affordable to Texans.

June – National Dairy Month – is the perfect time to celebrate milk, the products it creates, the consumers who enjoy it, and the men and women who work hard not just this month, but year-round, to put it on Texans' tables.

History shows that humans have been consuming the milk of other mammals thousands of years before the birth of Christ. Today, an estimated 6 billion people worldwide consume milk and the products it makes.

In Texas, 456 dairies produced more than 813.6 million pounds of milk in April (the latest statistics available), or about 98.6 million gallons.

So it's worrisome to see that a prolonged drought, high feed and fuel costs, and tough economy continue to force producers out of business. At the start of this century, in January 2000, about 1,150 dairy farms were in operation.

Just as it's easy for anyone in our modern world to get caught up in the daily struggles of earning a living or raising a family, so dairy producers can get fixated on their business challenges plus the 24/7 responsibilities of running a farm.

How to refocus? Sometimes milk has the power to calm the mind, as I learned during busy days at the Texas Capitol. It's smooth and cool. In a Food Network world of fancy food and complicated cooking, milk is proof that goodness can be simple. Other than pasteurization, it doesn't change much between cow and grocery store.

As Americans try and eat healthier, milk has long been one of the most wholesome products on the market. Interestingly, for a product that has been around so long, we are still identifying new benefits; chocolate milk is now being promoted as a recovery drink after a strenuous workout.

Milk also can have strong emotional connections. A bowl of ice cream might mentally transport you back to the simpler time of childhood, when nothing else could hit the spot during a hot summer afternoon of play. The sight and smell of butter melting on hot mashed potatoes might bring memories of a family holiday flooding back. Macaroni and cheese can be the ultimate comfort food.

Milk and milk products can bring out so many positive memories and feelings. There's just no substitute.

Cheers to milk producers and consumers during National Dairy Month.

Darren Turley is executive director of the Texas Association of Dairymen (www.milk4texas.org), the advocate and unified voice in government and regulatory matters for the dairy industry in Texas since 1991. You can find TAD on Facebook at www.facebook.com/texasdairy.

DIGITAL PHOTO OF THE AUTHOR ATTACHED.

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