

150,000 samples checked per month

Inspectors aim for protection

By DIETER KRIEG

HARRISBURG - With approximately 16,000 farms to inspect, Pennsylvania's milk sanitarians have a big job to do throughout the year. Officers at the Bureau of Foods and Chemistry, Division of Milk Sanitation, here, estimate that their approved labs check upwards of 150,000 samples of milk per month.

This monitoring of milk quality - from farm to supermarket - has the dual purpose of assuring consumers a clean, disease-free, unadulterated supply of milk; and providing producers and processors with quality standards which insure existence of a market.

The constant aim of the inspection program on the farm is to have all producers meet minimum standards which are conducive to the production of high-quality milk. It's a goal which is never fully achieved, says G. William Fouse, chief of the milk sanitation division. The reason for this partial failure is two-fold. The immense proportions of the task make it physically impossible to monitor every individual situation, and it's some peoples' nature to not heed sanitation regulations. We will always have a certain group of farmers who are cut off the market or who are border-line cases, Fouse indicated. The majority, however, are in line with the state's sanitation regulations.

Nevertheless, when a problem arises, and the milk sanitation division is made aware of it, approved inspectors check on the situation and apply codes to remedy it.

Fouse's division has the responsibility of checking milk all along the route from the farm to the supermarket. The task includes all stores which handle milk, bottling and processing plants, at least 1,200 tank truck drivers, milk trucks, and 16,000 producing farms.

A staff of 22 people directly under Fouse's command facilitates in carrying out the public health laws. Sixteen of these work out of seven regional offices which are scattered throughout the state. The network of dairy sanitarians spreads out from there to include 650 inspectors, of which only 150 are designated as "agents of the Secretary of Agriculture." Much of the work is contracted to 60 commercial laboratories whose services are hired for the purpose of getting the monumental task of testing accomplished. Each of these laboratories and their director is state-approved, says Fouse, and each analyst is tested for skills and accuracy twice a year.

With much to do, and a limited staff, Fouse admits that problems do arise from time to time. On top of that, milk is often a subject of consumer concern, and consequently a political issue. This makes the task of his office even more difficult. Fouse has been a member of the dairy sanitation division since 1958 and worked as a quality control technician in industry prior to that. In 1969 he became head of the division of milk sanitation.

While his office still has a sizable task, it is not as broad-

based as it once was. Prior to 1972 his inspectors were going all over the country to inspect farms and distribution points which were shipping milk into Pennsylvania. A new law, however, has eliminated this program and Pennsylvania now has "reciprocal agreements" with other states to take care of these type of situations. Fouse noted that 80 per cent of the milk supply in the Commonwealth is subject to conform to federal standards.

To be a state-approved inspector, the applicant must not only pass tests on procedures, but also demonstrate in the field that he can effectively communicate with farmers and milk handlers. In other words, the ability to handle a problem is as important as being able to point it out. Persons with a dairy farm background are preferred.

The average inspector has 100 farms under his jurisdiction, Fouse said. They are trained in various aspects of milk sanitation, as well as pesticide regulations, and related matters such as bulk tank agitation pipeline installation criteria, and leucocyte counts. Commenting on pesticide regulations, Fouse indicated that they are strict, but that they, and any other activities of his department aren't meant to hurt anyone. "Our job is to protect the public," he explained, "we are not out to penalize anyone unjustly." Ad-

mitting that a dairyman can face considerable financial losses if pesticide residues are found in his milk, he stated that some monetary help from the U.S. Department of Agriculture is available IF it can be proved that the pesticide in question was used according to directions.

Service, efficiency, and integrity of the sanitation program have improved over the last few years, as Fouse sees it. A new regulation, for example, makes it mandatory for his department to be notified of any shipper suspensions and take-ons within 24 hours. This is to prevent "banned" milk from entering the market via alternative outlets. Efficiency has been improved upon through the previously mentioned "reciprocal agreements."

The integrity of samples had been a big problem in the past, Fouse stated. "But producers can be assured now that the laboratory report he receives reflects the actual quality of the milk in his farm tank. This provides assurance of safety not only to the consumer, but also farmer-producers. The integrity problem has been eliminated, Fouse explained, by making sure that all sample testing is certified, weeding out sloppy samplers, and insisting on official samples. There was a time when "official" samples came straight from any bulk tank driver.

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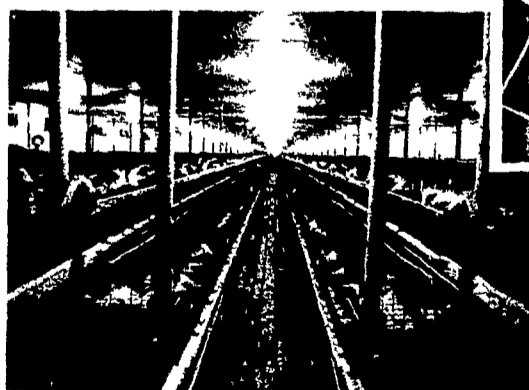
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