

Public awareness is Key to juggling milk

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GRANTHAM — At Ashcombe Dairy, they are in the business of making milk easier to swallow.

But they don't do it with additives. After all, milk is a natural, says John Cope, General Manager and Vice-President of Ashcombe Dairy located at Grantham and Dover.

Ashcombe has been in operation since the 1800's and solely owned by the Thorton family. The farming business began when the family purchased numerous farms in the area and ran them as tenant operations.

However, as time moved on so did the way of operating large enterprises. And as the business operation changed to a one-family enterprise, so did the ideas of what exactly they wanted to do with their numerous farms at the two locations.

The Thorton's decided to venture along the juggling route. In 1960, at the very beginning of the introduction of juggling operations throughout the country, Ashcombe's opened its doors to the public.

What is the secret to this 23-year-old juggling business? According to

Cope, who has been with the company for 31 years even before the juggling was started: "Our success over the years has been quality, hard work and public awareness."

Public awareness of Ashcombe's and its main product, milk, has been a benefit to the business over the years, said the manager. Ashcombes promotes public awareness through year-round tours of the entire plant, tracing the operation from milking of the cows to ice cream making. Cope stated that the high point of the tour season is from mid-April until the end of May. During that six-week period over 1,200 students from surrounding school districts visit the dairy.

Also, people can drop by at any time throughout the year to watch the milking process at work. So the visitors won't miss a thing, Ashcombes built a high glass window in front of the parlor area where anyone can get a good view of what exactly takes place during milking time.

Cope remarked, "I am always surprised by the misconceptions people have of the farming industry, and for most, they just have no real concept at all."



The Ashcombe Farm Dairy Store...

Consequently he said I believe that public awareness is just one of the problems dairymen have to face at this time and must work at correcting."

Coupled with the tours and drop-in visits, Ashcombes supplies several picnic tables outside the dairy stores where customers can enjoy their homemade ice cream, milk shakes and sundaes under the open skies and beside a pasture of dairy cattle.

Cope stated that this relaxing country dairy store atmosphere just didn't happen - it was planned. We want people to feel comfortable and at home here at Ashcombes. "I am proud of our dairy products," said Cope. And I want our customers and other people to know that." However, he said if the store and dairy had a sloppy, unclean appearance we wouldn't be in business today because no one would believe in our product. Cope stated, "Appearance is a golden asset."

Cope believes that every farmer should be concerned about his farms appearance. Today's consumers are health conscious buyers, he said, and every farmer needs to realize the asset and the benefits a tidy farm appearance can have on his product.

Along with quality and appearance, the owners and employees have played the most important rule of all in the success of the Ashcombe farming operation said Cope. The owners have provided a strong foundation for their business with an attitude of care and interest in their employees through the years. Cope stated that Ashcombe has a progressive pension, medical,

vacation and bonus plans for all employees.

Along with a benefit package, employees get something more - areas of responsibilities such as herdsman, crop supervisor, manufacturing and many more. In each of these areas the employees are given the responsibilities to make decisions, as well as mistakes. Cope notes that most of the employees have 10 to 20 years of service in the company and work as if it was their own business. "There is an element of pride among all the people at Ashcombe," said Cope.

At the Grantham location Ashcombe's milk approximately 140 animals of which seventy percent are registered and thirty percent are grade. Their milking operation consists of a double six with automatic take off and a milking schedule of three times daily.

Ashcombe's market their milk in three ways, which include retail sales at the dairy store, ice cream sold at the store and the remaining surplus is sent to Interstate.

And just like all other dairies, Ashcombe is caught in the surplus problem. However, this manager doesn't quite agree with the deduction effort. Cope remarked, "This deduction of money from the milk check is counter productive. I appreciate the dilemma of the surplus problem, but I feel there are better ways of coping."

First, he feels it has to be a nation-wide industry effort to get out of the immediate production system and penalize those who over produce. Cope noted that this would be a radical step. However, all the present deduction from the milk check is doing is making

dairymen add more cattle to their herd, producing even more surplus.

"But, they need that money to continue their cash flow needs," he said.

Cope said, "If I could tell every farmer in the United States what the farmer really needs for his products, I would say advertising." He feels that dairymen need to organize a massive nationwide advertising program. He stated, "Milk is now the nation's #4 drink, outranked by coffee, beer and soda. Look at their advertising programs on television, radio, magazines and billboards. These products advertising campaigns are everywhere and are top of the line."

Along with advertising, said Cope, the farmer himself has to be a public relations representative for his own product and industry. "We are only three percent of today's population and we're producing all the food. Nevertheless, we have to make the non-farming public aware of the value, abundance and the way the food is made available to them before we can expect their support in the supermarket and with our immediate problems."

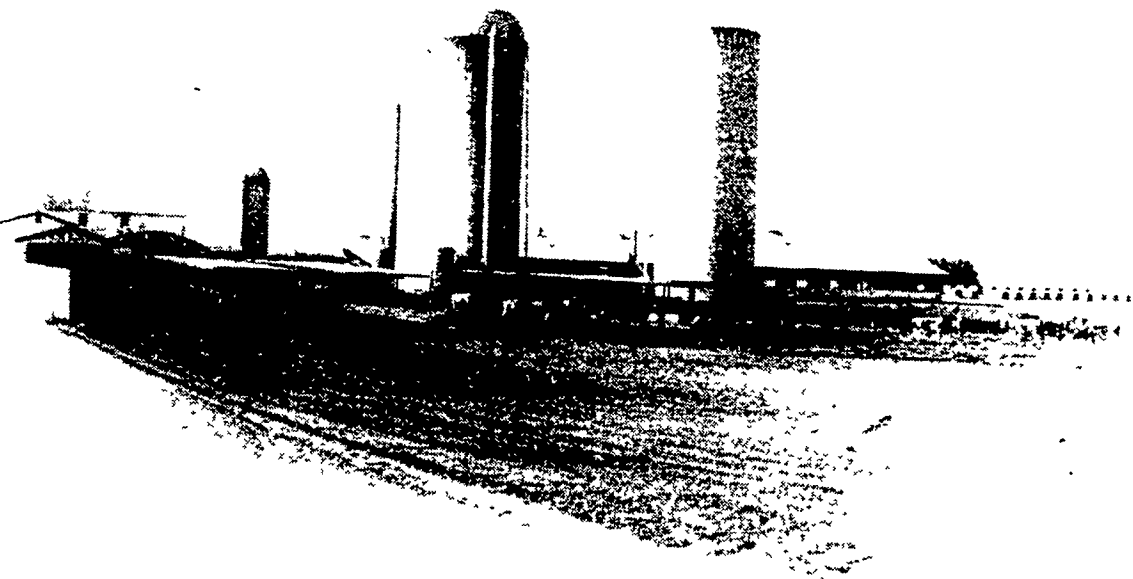
This manager feels that with an effective advertising program the industry can work towards discouraging the use of imitation products that are bombarding the market place. "We have to start working with fast food and family restaurants on ways that can promote 'real' dairy products."

Cope notes that today's family eats over fifty percent of their meals out of the home. This means that milk is not drunk at meals or being used in cooking and baking

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John Cope, vice president and general manager of Ashcombe dips ice cream for milk shake.



And an overall view of the farm itself.