

# Can Carrots Really Replace Cheese?

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NEWARK (Delaware) — Recently, while eating lunch at the local McDonalds, I read the menu and made a discovery that startled me. Among other things, the menu stated very prominently: New — Carrots replace cheese on garden and side salads ... fewer calories, less fat.

Reading on, I noted they still offer "regular" cheese biscuits, "regular" cheeseburgers, quarter-pounder with "regular" cheese, and pizza with "regular" cheese, but everything else is now changed to lowfat — lowfat shakes, lowfat frozen yogurt and 1 percent milk! Yet, the one item that really hit home was "carrots replace cheese."

Now, if I were simply a diet-conscious consumer, this menu-item replacement would probably make sense. Some people may even say this kind of change is long overdue. However, I am a dairy farmer, and this newly announced company policy on food offerings raises some concern.

As a dairy farmer, my income and that of many suppliers from whom I buy comes primarily from the sale of milk, half of which usually goes into the manufacture of cheese, yogurt, shakes, etc. So the volume of manufacture of these dairy products affects my pocketbook.

If more cheese is made and sold, my price per 100 pounds of milk from the farm goes up, but if less cheese is sold, a surplus may occur, resulting in a drop in milk price. This is simple economics, the law of supply and demand. In recent months, dairy farmers

in this region have seen drastic drops in the milk price on the farm — about 30 percent!

No doubt this means supply is exceeding demand in the regional marketplace, yet my cows continue to produce at the same level and have to be milked every day, twice a day. My bills for electricity, fuel, gas, taxes, buildings, repair, mortgage, etc., continue to come in regardless of whether milk supply in the market is more or less than market demand.

If a major company like McDonalds changes from cheese to carrots in part of its menu, this means a lot of cheese in the market is all of a sudden without a buyer.

Is this just the beginning? Will other restaurant chains and companies reduce the purchase of real cheese or maybe one day stop buying it altogether, replacing it, say, with a soybean imitation cheese? Is a major change in the making?

In the equation of supply versus demand often we have tended to look first at supply. For example, a couple of years ago we killed a lot of cows to reduce milk supply surplus. And we started a 15 cents/100 pounds of farm milk deduction campaign to promote the demand side of milk.

Apparently, though, we are far from having made major gains in the market, given McDonald's menu announcement that they are replacing cheese with carrots. This could very well "kill" many more cows in order to bring the equation into balance, unless we, the dairy farmers and processors, change also.

Or should we? Are we supposed to become more market-oriented in our production procedures and in the promotion of positive health

information about our products? Is this where greater profitability lies for the future of the dairy farmer?

Some years ago many of us were convinced that there was nothing better than a glass of Golden Guernsey milk. But what happened to it in the marketplace? Somehow the market has asked for more of another kind of milk: the big winner in recent years was and is the 2 percent milk, for which we dairy farmers have been unable to breed a cow. Or have we been unwilling to try such a change?

Consider other products in the marketplace, like beer for instance. Whoever proved it is as good for you as milk? But beer advertisements successfully make you believe that you feel good after drinking beer (and that includes me!).

Beer manufacturers have even changed to "light"-labeled beer, to appeal to diet-conscious consumers. Possibly one of the differences between dairy farmers and breweries is that dairy farmers only produce but do not process, nor do they devise new processing methods and gimmicks to establish a stronger niche in the marketplace. Breweries, on the other hand, respond more quickly and easily to what the market wants, because they are both producers AND processors.

At the recent annual meeting of our Philadelphia-based Dairy Council, which is affiliated with us dairy farmers, a significant change in policy was announced: Become more market-oriented and inform consumers about the product's

qualities that will promote sales. This leaves us dairy farmers in a dilemma. Presumably we are not producing what the majority of the market wants or, at least, not much of it. What can we do? Is it time to change?

Senator Leahy's group recently tried a legislative solution, one which would have solved neither the market supply nor the demand problems. It might well have aggravated the situation, except for an idea that has worked well on the West Coast for some time: increase solids contents in milk, even in 2 percent milk, to a minimum of 10 percent. This is long overdue here, and incidentally, the dairy farm business on the West Coast is flourishing.

Now, as we agonize over how best to find a solution to our marketplace problems, there comes along some unexpected good news. In recent years, in fact since the medical findings that milk drinkers and cheese eaters have less colon cancer, fewer dental cavities and less old-age bone deterioration, encouraging news about milk has been rare.

Now, a 10-year British Medical Research Council study of 4,200 middle-aged men from the urban area of Bristol and the rural areas of Wales and conducted at the Llandough Hospital, has found that those men who drank milk every day had significantly fewer heart attacks.

Ten percent of the men studied who had heart attacks did not drink milk, 6.3 percent who drank 1/2


pint milk every day had heart attacks and 5.8 percent who drank 1 pint of milk a day had heart attacks. Only 1.2 percent who drank more than a daily pint of milk had heart attacks.

Furthermore, a comprehensive nutrition study reveals that butter-eaters had half the number of heart attacks of those eating margarine. The research conclusion was that "... it is a popular myth that consuming animal fat is bad for the heart. This study found nothing to connect the two."

So, what am I saying? Should we change our cows and our milk production procedures to become more market-oriented? Maybe and maybe not.

The market interests are dynamic and change faster than we can change our cows, but processing methods can and should become more market-oriented. This would help both consumers and dairy farmers. Certainly, it would stimulate consumption if the 30percent recent price drop at the dairy farm had been paralleled in the grocery store!

As representatives to our milk marketing and promotion agencies who spend our 15-cents-per-100-pounds-milk promotion checkoff, we should ask for a greater percentage of this money to go to more medical research for this kind of information. In the long run, this is the most powerful promotion of milk and cheese, and we ought to spread this good news widely.



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