

Dairy Food Safety Concerns Drive Regulatory, Herd Health Concerns

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WASHINGTON, D.C. —

Recent changes in the health regulations governing milk production and a continuing focus on residue prevention efforts reflect continuing concern — both valid and unfounded — about the safety of the nation's milk supply, according to dairy industry officials who deal with this issue.

Local dairymen must cope with a number of new rules derived from changes to the Pasteurized Milk Ordinance, a federal regulation governing the sale of milk. They also are being encouraged to embrace a voluntary residue prevention program, at least in part, as a way of heading off further restrictions on the availability of antibiotics and other drugs.

The prevention program, developed jointly by the American Veterinary Medical Association and the National Milk Producers Federation, identifies 10 areas in which farmers should concentrate their efforts, including herd health, drug storage, and the use of screening tests to verify lack of residues. It was designed to be a cooperative effort among farmers, their veterinarians, and fieldmen for the milk

handlers.

None of the recommended practices are new and many of them already were in use on most farms, according to Dr. William Sischo, an extension veterinarian at Penn State University. Nevertheless, he said, nearly every dairymen would benefit from the exercise of going over the details of the program.

"It won't be effective as a regulatory tool," Sischo said. "But it is a good program in general for people to sort out how they manage herd health."

Farmers have other reasons to participate in the program, according to Doug Carmel, an extension veterinarian at the University of Maryland.

Strong participation by farmers will lessen the pressure on the federal Food and Drug Administration to take more drugs off the market and to limit the use of the so-called "extra label" policy, Carmel said.

Such participation also will gain points for the dairy industry in the ongoing struggle for the trust of the impressionable consumer.

"I think consumers are demanding a food supply that's free of residues," Carmel said. "A lot of that fear (concerning the presence

of animal drugs, hormones, pesticides, and other contaminants) is unfounded, but we're not dealing with facts. We're dealing with emotion against fact."

The safety of the nation's milk supply has been questioned in front-page articles in the "Wall Street Journal" and other prominent newspapers in recent years. Recently, a television station in northeastern Pennsylvania aired a program that featured a short segment on alleged problems with residues and other contaminants, according to Jan Carson, a Pennsylvania Farmers Association spokesman.

Finally, there are some dairymen who will not have a choice as to whether or not to use the program. Changes in the Pasteurized Milk Ordinance (PMO) will require participation from farmers found in violation of residue standards.

The PMO changes represent another side of the residue issue: the big stick of rules and regulation, according to Sischo. However, like the quality assurance program, the regulatory changes encompass many things that already are common practice in the industry.

Beginning in January, milk handlers were required to test all tankers of milk for traces of the beta-lactam family of antibiotics, which includes penicillin. However, Atlantic Dairy Cooperative, the region's largest, already was doing so, as were a number of other cooperatives and companies, according to Don Breiner, the cooperative's quality and field services manager.

The handlers also must sample loads at random for the presence of other drugs. Many already were.

The results of such screening tests and the identification of producers responsible for any residues that are detected must be passed along to the state officials who oversee milk safety. Beginning July 1, the PMO requires that farmers found in violation must have their permits to market Grade A milk revoked for two days. A second such violation within a 12-month period requires a four-day suspension. And a third violation could result in the permanent suspension of the permit at the discretion of state authorities, Breiner said.

Again, these rules — with the exception of the permanent suspension — are nothing new. In recent years, the widespread practice of area cooperatives has been to not pay their members for milk found to be tainted with residues and also to charge these violators with the cost of dumping tankers of milk if they have become contaminated as well, according to Breiner.

Because the milk from most farms is picked up every other day, the dumping of a shipment of milk is, in effect, a two-day suspension,

he said. The cooperatives would like state authorities to accept that this policy satisfies the new PMO requirement, at least for first-time offenders.

"We're hoping that the states are going to accept that rather than issue a two-day suspension," said Jim Reeder, Breiner's counterpart at Maryland and Virginia Cooperative Milk Producers Association.

For now, the major focus of detection efforts remains the beta-lactam family. Any positive results from the quick screening tests used to check every load are verified using the officially recognized disc assay for these antibiotics, Breiner noted. These screening tests also are being used to check for the presence of other types of drugs, but with these the official verification test involves far more expensive and time consuming laboratory work, Breiner noted.

Official verification is important for legal reasons. "If I dump based on a Pen-zyme test or a Charm test, I could be taken to court because they're not official tests," Breiner said.

However, FDA officials and representatives from the Association of Analytical Chemists reportedly are rushing to approve some of the screening tests as official for regulatory work.

Yet another PMO change, set to take effect July 1, 1993, will lower the allowable level of somatic cells in milk from 1,000,000 per milliliter to 750,000. Although the vast majority of area dairymen maintain herd averages well below this count, the change will affect a handful of problem operations, the cooperative officials noted.

Expert System For Apple Growers

ALLENTOWN (Lehigh Co.) — The Penn State Apple Orchard Consultant, an expert system for apple growers, has been updated and will be available for sale in mid-March.

The software, developed over four years by Penn State researchers, is one of the first expert systems available to fruit growers. It combines the knowledge of a wide variety of specialists and simulates the decision-making process they would use to solve problems, according to Jan McClure, coordinator of the Penn State expert systems development group.

Growers who use the Penn State Apple Orchard Consultant will have the knowledge of plant pathologists, entomologists, horticulturists, meteorologists and economists at their fingertips. They can bypass the phone and consult the computer system for advice on how to manage their orchards.

McClure says the system is more than a collection of data. It's

not just a computerized production guide — it actually helps growers think through a problem.

The Apple Orchard Consultant can evaluate information, diagnose problems and symptoms and recommend action. Using the software program, growers create a profile of their own orchard. They update that profile daily with information on weather conditions, insects and diseases. When they present a problem to the system, it considers all the variables and uses its storehouse of knowledge to offer recommendations.

New features for 1992 include a separate spray record-keeping system and easier-to-use weather input screens. Growers now can print out weather information and view infection periods for each disease.

Also included this year are more data on predator-pest interactions and information on the European apple sawfly and San Jose scale.

The researchers worked with 27 apple growers in Pennsylvania to test the system and to make it more helpful and user friendly.

Although it was designed for growers in Pennsylvania, producers in states as far away as Washington are finding the expert system helpful.

The 1992 version of the Penn State Apple Orchard Consultant is available for \$250 from the Expert Systems Development Group, The Pennsylvania State University, 501 Agricultural Sciences and Industries Building, University Park, PA 16802. The software can be used with Macintosh or MS/DOS computers.

Other expert systems available from Penn State include Bee Aware (honey bee diseases and pests), which sells for \$35, and PLEX (potato leathopper on alfalfa), which costs \$75. MAIZE, a system for field corn, will be finished this spring.

Public Auction Register

Closing Date Monday 5:00 P.M.
of each week's publication

MARCH

SAT. MAR. 7 - 9AM, Very Nice Antiques, Guns, Household, Glassware, Tools. To Be Held At Redding Auction Service Located Taking Route 34, 1/2 Mile North Of Gettysburg, Pa - Bear Right At Y (At Car Wash) & Continue 2 Miles On Table Rock Road To Auction Site. C. David Redding, Auct.

SAT. MAR. 7 - 9AM, Small Items, Tools, Misc. Office Equip. Located: Newville, Pa. Off I-81, Exit 11, Route 233 North To Borough Of Newville On Right. Sale Signs Posted Days Of Sale. By, Hefflefinger Monuments. Gary L. Mentzer, Aucts.

WED. MAR. 11 - 9AM, Consignment Auction. Located Cochran Auction Complex, 7704 Mapleville Rd., Md. Route 66, Boonsboro, Md. Cochran Aucts. & Associates Ltd.

FRI. MAR. 13 - 9AM, Farm Equipment Auction.

Located: A.&C. Diffenbach Auction Inc., 100 W. Jackson St., Box 186, New Holland, Pa. 17557. Alan Diffenbach Auct.

SAT. MAR. 14 - 9AM, Very Nice Antiques & Collectibles, Very Nice Glassware & China Items, Household. Located At Redding Auction Service Located Taking Route 34, 1/2 Mile North Of Gettysburg, Pa. - Bear Right At Y (At Car Wash) & Continue 2 Miles On Table Rock Road To Auction Site. C. David Redding, Auct.

SAT. MAR. 14 - 9AM, Big Machinery, 10AM, Fraley's Annual Spring Farm Machinery Consignment Sale. Located On Our Farm 3 Miles E Of Muncy, Pa., Along Kepner Hill Road. Watch For Auction Arrows At Junctions Of Rts. 442 & 405. (Lyc. Co.). Fraley Auction Co.

SAT. MAR. 14 - 9AM, Public Auction Of Complete Estate, Antiques & Period Style Furniture, Persian & Iran Rugs, Jewelry. Harry Rudnick & Sons, Inc., Sales Manager, Aucts.,

Real Estate Broker.

SAT. MAR. 14 - 9:30AM, Antiques, Collectibles, Trains, Guns, Trapping Equipment, Tools, Boat, Motors, Riding Mower, Household Items. Located 1019 High St., Duncannon, Pa. Owners, Glenn & Carol Bolden. Kerry Pae Aucts.

SAT. MAR. 14 - 10AM, Indiana Farmers Livestock Market Annual Consignment Equipment Sale. Located Indiana Farmers Livestock Market, Homer City.

Regional Meetings

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mond Grange Hall, Hammond, N.Y. Region 3, St. Lawrence, Franklin, Clinton and Essex counties. Jim Sullivan of Hammond is regional director.

• March 23, 8 p.m., Jefferson County Cooperative Extension Center, Watertown, N.Y. Reg-

ion 4, Jefferson and Lewis counties. Fred Goodnough of Mansville, N.Y., is regional director.

All dairy farmers are urged to attend to discuss plans for the future and to elect officers. For further information, call the RCMA office, toll free, at (800) 634-3723.

Cool Flying At The Farm Show



On the parking lot of the state Farm Show, groundworkers hook up air conditioning units to a crane helicopter (a Sikorsky S-58T). The units were then flown and settled down into place for use in the complex's heating cooling system. The unusual sight is the result of work being done to renovate the Farm Show complex, which has been a several-year, \$8 million project, projected to be finished in October. The renovation has included, in addition to work on the heating-cooling system, a \$2.7 million re-roofing of the large arena, about \$500,000 for new lighting and sound systems, and \$3.2 million to build an additional livestock exhibition hall. The new hall is to add 82,000 square feet for a total of 460,000 square feet of indoor exhibit space.

Photo by William Lelick