

'Green Milk' Successfully Test-Marketed At Mid-Atlantic Stores

UNIVERSITY PARK (Centre Co.) — People are concerned about protecting water quality and some even are willing to pay for it, said a scientist in Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences.

The Environmental Quality Initiative Inc. — a collaboration between Penn State, the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, the Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture, the Rodale Institute, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency — recently tested people's willingness to purchase milk in an eco-labeled milk carton, "with successful results," said Les Lanyon, professor of soil fertility.

With support from a Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection grant, Chesapeake Milk hit the shelves in December 1998. Produced by dairy farmers in southeastern Pennsylvania, the milk in specially marked cartons was test-marketed for more than a year at Fresh Fields grocery stores in Pennsylvania, Maryland, northern Virginia, and Washington, D.C.

"When consumers purchase Chesapeake Milk, dairy farmers who are doing a good job of protecting water quality receive a premium," Lanyon explained. "A nickel per half-gallon goes directly to these farmers."

To participate, farmers undergo a yearly evaluation that examines how well farmstead structures and management practices protect water quality on the farm. The evaluation, performed by Leon Weber, Rodale Institute's on-farm coordinator, looks at six areas around the dairy farmstead, such as whether cows are kept out of streams, how barnyard runoff is managed, and how pesticides are stored and handled. So far, 20 Pennsylvania dairy farmers have participated.

"Even farmers who didn't qualify for the program ended

up making changes," said Weber. "Farmers are concerned about the environment and realize these practices can make business sense as well."

"Agriculture is still considered by many to be the number one cause of nonpoint source pollution," Lanyon said. "Historically, government cost-share programs paid for some of the cost of water quality protection on farms to reduce the 'burden' on farmers. But many people have become disillusioned with the level of environmental quality resulting from this approach. Other methods, such as direct regulation, are likely to be implemented."

"Typically, regulations specify conditions that must be met or practices that must be installed," he said. "To deal with additional costs, farmers often have to increase milk production or increase the number of cows they milk. This could accelerate the evolution of farms in the 'get bigger or get out' direction and does little to preserve small family farms."

This issue is particularly serious in Pennsylvania, which ranks fourth in the nation in milk production and where average herd size is only two-thirds of the national average. Lancaster County, where the dairy herds are smaller than the state norm, has the highest dairy cow population per square mile in the U.S. At the same time, more than half of the state — including Lancaster County — contributes freshwater to the Chesapeake Bay.

"Manure and sediment that are allowed to run off from Pennsylvania farms can cause serious problems in the bay," said Turner Odell, staff attorney for the Chesapeake Bay Foundation. "It is important that we encourage farmers to use environmentally sensitive practices that protect water quality, but we also understand that these

practices must be economically sustainable."

The group learned that introducing an eco-labeled product is not without its challenges. "It's not easy to achieve buy-in from players in the food system whose agendas may not include environmental protection," Lanyon said. "It's also not easy to com-

municate new ideas to milk consumers."

"However, we learned that dairy farmers are very interested in this effort. Top government officials also supported the concept. And consumers purchased enough of the Chesapeake Milk for premiums to go back to

farmers.

"Now, the challenge is to create more opportunities for eco-labeled products," Lanyon said. "If we're successful, the costs of environmental protection will be shared by those who care and are committed enough to act on what they value."

Pennsylvania Ayrshire Picnic Set For June 25

The Pennsylvania Ayrshire breeders have planned their annual picnic on Sunday, June 25 at Myron and Teresa Pomraning's farm located at 491 Slab Road, Delta. Starting time is 11 p.m.

Association officials have planned a relaxing day of fun and fellowship with fellow Ayrshire breeders. Activities that are planned include various industry-related games and contests, horseshoes, volleyball, and swimming. Bring your lawn chairs, swimsuits, and towels. Lunch will be served at 12:30 and will feature a pig roast with all the

trimmings.

Directions to the farm are as follows:

From York, follow route 74 south through Red Lion, Brogue, and Airville to Route 372 east heading for the Susquehanna River and Lancaster County. Turn left onto 372 and go one-half mile and turn right onto Slab Road. The farm is 1.6 miles on the left.

From Lancaster, follow Route 272 south to Route 372 west. At the Buck turn right onto 372, cross the Norman Wood Bridge over the Susquehanna River. Take the second road left, Flaharty

Road. There turn left and follow to stop, bear right, farm is on the right one-fourth mile.

If you plan to come please RSVP to Teresa at 1-800-551-6567 by June 20.

Ayrshire breeders are also asked to remember that consignments for the annual Raise To Graze sale scheduled for August 19 are due by July 1. Please send your consignment information to John Rodgers at 717-935-5242 or Ben Hillyard at 507-569-4371. Consignments are needed so reply as soon as possible.

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