

June is Dairy Month

Did you know that June is Dairy Month? In Ontario County alone, there are 110 dairy farms with a total of over 15,000 cows. Here are some interesting facts on dairy products that you might not know.

Milk is the healthiest and most abundant natural source of nutrition on earth. Milk is nutritious in its pure form and doesn't need to be fortified. While 87% of milk is actually water, it has high values of calcium and vitamin D. There are many varieties of milk: whole, 1%, 2%, skim, organic, non-BST (no injections to promote higher milk production). There are also many other dairy products like ice cream, yogurt, cottage cheese, cream cheese, butter and more! Milk is getting a lot of press recently, in addition to the advertisements that feature celebrity milk moustaches, because some studies indicate that including dairy products in a diet can contribute to successful weight loss.

Dairy farms today are far different than those of years past because they utilize technology to keep the cows clean and comfortable. You might be surprised at what you would find on today's dairy farm.

Cows don't need a bed with programmable numbers or pillow tops but they are partial to clean and comfortable bedding like water mattresses, and sand and plenty of fluffy straw. Sawdust and recycled products are also widely used.

If you have seen a cow toss their heads, this is its way of trying to get at an itch. Today, free stall barns are built with cow comfort stations complete with rotating brushes to scratch whatever itches! If you visit a dairy farm, you may find cows standing right under these bristly brushes to scratch their backs!

Climate controlled barns with tunnel ventilation keep cows cool through continuous air movement. The effect is something like being in an air tunnel and prevents stale air from collecting in the barns. A cow's comfort zone is between 30F and 72F degrees with low humidity

A sprinkling system keeps the cows cool in hot weather by misting them. These systems are installed in holding areas while the animals are waiting to be being milked or over the free stalls.

A flush system operates with a current of water washing waste into a gutter to keep manure off the cows. Other systems include alley scraps that continuously scrape waste away from the cows.

Some cows are outfitted with pedometers to track their activities. When a cow is taking fewer steps, it could be a signal that the cow is ill and the farmer is able to intervene quicker.

Farmers utilize computer software to profile important events in the life of their cows. People who work regularly with a herd acknowledge that each cow has a distinct “personality,” but now each cow can be tracked with information on its birth date, breeding, illnesses, vaccinations, and number of days milked.

A dairy farm employs a team of people, each with his or her own special training and talents. Members of the team usually include a nutritionist, a veterinarian, a hoof trimmer, a herdsman and a breeder, are responsible for the success of the overall dairy operation. Farmers and their team members continually upgrade their skills and their techniques through educational programming like that of Cornell Cooperative Extension and its workshops and publications.

When you pour that milk on your cereal, you will now know a little bit more about those contented cows that produce the milk that goes in your coffee, on your cereal or in the glass that you drink with lunch.

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