

June Dairy Month

Close your eyes for a moment and imagine what you think a dairy farm in Wisconsin looks like today. Did you picture a red barn, black and white cows out on a green pasture, and a man in bibbed



coveralls tending to his herd? While there are still some farms that still would fit this description perfectly, there are many more that look vastly different. But, just because these farms may appear different, it does not make them bad. Just like people, farms come in all shapes and sizes.

As you drive across Wisconsin you may notice that a lot of dairy farms have been constructing larger barns for cattle that we refer to as freestall barns. These barns are the

result of years of technology and innovation by dairy cattle researchers and behaviorists in order to provide the maximum comfort for the cows. Yes, there are actually people who dedicate their whole lives to determining how big a stall for a cow should be in order for them to be comfortable or where fans should be placed in barn to achieve enough air movement to ventilate the barn. The ultimate goal for these barns is for the cows to be as relaxed as possible. We want cows to lay down for at least 12 hours a day! These barns are also designed to allow cows to eat, drink, and interact with other cows. Finally, the advantage of the more open freestall barns used today is that they are easier to clean out, which keeps cows cleaner and healthier. It could be thought that while the old, red dairy barns were great homes for cows, the new freestall barns are practically mansions.



Another type of farm you may have heard about while exploring the beautiful countryside is the organic farm. But how is organic farming different from conventional farming? It must be stated that all dairy farmers across the country are committed to producing high-quality milk and maintaining proper animal care and environmental practices on their farms. The definition of organic milk or produce refers to farm management practices, not to the product itself. Conventional dairy producers use best management practices to ensure that dairy cows are healthy by providing them with comfortable living conditions, nutritious diets and good medical care.



Organic dairy foods must additionally meet the requirements of USDA's National Organic Program. This includes using only organic fertilizers and pesticides, and not using rBST. Dairy foods can be labeled "USDA Organic" only if all of the additional criteria are met. In terms of quality, safety and nutrition, there's no difference between organic and regular milk. Both contain the same combination of nutrients that make dairy foods an important part of a healthy diet. Organic milk is one choice among many in the dairy case that can help people meet the U.S. government's recommended three servings a day of milk and milk products.

While it seems like there are so many different things that have evolved on dairy farms, there is one thing that has generally remained the same: they are about family. Almost 90 percent of U.S. farms are operated by individuals or family corporations. Additionally, a recent survey of America's young





farmers and ranchers revealed that 97.2 percent planned to farm and ranch for life. And 90 percent said they would like their children to follow in their footsteps. This desire provides a strong incentive for today's farmers and ranchers to protect and preserve the natural resources on their property. Not only is the land and its resources a farmer's lifeblood today, it represents the future for his family and its business. So as you drive across the beautiful farmland we have in Wisconsin, please remember that there is no one way a farm needs to look as long as all those involved on the farm have the common goal of healthy, happy animals and strong family values.

Remember a great way to learn about Wisconsin dairy farm is to attend a local dairy breakfast in the month of June. Both Sheboygan and Ozaukee counties will be hosting events this year and info about each can be found at <http://www.dairydaysofsummer.com/farmbreakfast-home.html>.

