

Lesson 6: Industry Issues

The American public is becoming more aware of agricultural production practices. People unfamiliar with animal agriculture frequently do not fully understand modern livestock management techniques. Dairy producers must be educated about industry issues to be able to address them effectively.

Consumer Concerns

American consumers are concerned about waste management, the use of medications in lactating cows, and animal welfare.

Dairy production often takes place on a large scale and partially in confinement settings. Dairy cattle kept in confined areas produce large amounts of waste. Consumers worry that improperly handled, untreated wastes will contaminate ground and surface water.

Drugs given to lactating cows also concern the public. People sometimes fear that medications given to lactating cows end up in fluid milk. They believe that these drugs may be harmful to humans, since they are meant for use in cattle.

The welfare of dairy cattle is a third issue of concern to consumers. They are worried about how management practices affect animal comfort and well-being. Consumers fear, for example, that cows and calves do not have sufficient freedom to move around and that cattle may not always be adequately supplied with shade and shelter.

Addressing Consumer Concerns

Dairy producers and the dairy industry are working to address consumer concerns about waste management, medications, and animal welfare. The National Milk Producers Federation and the Milk and Dairy Beef Quality Assurance Center are two industry organizations that provide information to producers about practices that might concern consumers. Their goal is to improve the quality of milk and dairy beef products by educating producers about management practices. The industry is also working to educate consumers about dairy production.

The industry is educating dairy producers about proper waste storage, management, and land application of wastes to avoid incidents that could damage the industry. Dairy producers must be aware of environmental laws and conscious of their part in preserving the environment.

The industry organizations mentioned above have initiated Milk and Dairy Beef Quality Assurance programs. They are designed to educate producers about management practices that can help them produce high quality milk and pure beef products. The voluntary programs focus on several points that can help producers improve their milk, including proper herd health management, sanitation, feeding, and record keeping.

Information on taking care of dairy cattle is also available to educate producers about management practices that will ensure animal welfare. For example, the American Farm Bureau and other dairy-related agencies have produced a two-part series of booklets about caring for dairy animals. The goal of producers is to provide care that results in productive, healthy, contented cows.

Food Safety

The consumers of American dairy products can be sure that products are safe because of inspections by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and state regulatory agencies. State inspections are generally carried out twice a year to look at factors such as drug usage and sanitation in the milking parlor. When milk is picked up from the producer, samples are tested for contaminants at both the farm and the processing plant to confirm that the milk is safe for fluid use or for further processing into products such as cheese, ice cream, and yogurt. Milk that is unfit for human use is added to animal feeds or dumped. Milk quality is monitored from the time it leaves the dairy until it reaches the consumer's home.

Conclusion

Dairy producers must address the concerns of the consumers of dairy products. By learning more about these issues and improving their management practices, producers can show that they can produce safe dairy foods in an environmentally conscious way. Industry groups and

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producers are also working to educate consumers about dairy production and the safety of dairy products. The USDA plays an important role in assuring the safety of these foods.

Credits

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