



## Milk Matters

a column by **Joseph O'Donnell**

# Don't take dairy for granted

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**Milk. Many in the world want it** – lots of it – and others take it for granted.

As countries develop, their economies grow and their focus turns to promoting better nutrition for their people. After all, good nutrition means good health – something even the wealthiest of nations desires. Good nutrition, however, doesn't necessarily mean being well fed. The United States is one of the best fed countries in the world, yet is beset with numerous health problems including type II diabetes, heart disease and obesity. Clearly, we are not the model for good health.

### Life expectancy lengthened

It wasn't this way in Grandma's day. Back then the major focus was on controlling infectious disease. Once that was under control, American life expectancy lengthened considerably. That is changing today. For the first time, we are looking at a generation where American parents will live longer than their children. This is a point of great historical and sociological significance. Our genetics haven't changed, however, our diets and lifestyles have changed significantly – for the worse.

Changes in food patterns and the effects of sedentary lifestyles are obvious, but the bigger question is why. Why did soft drinks replace milk as the beverage of choice at the dinner table? Why did fast, fried foods replace the baked, boiled or roasted foods of a previous generation? Beyond convenience and the sweet tempting taste – the answer may lie in snazzy marketing and a receptive consumer. There's big money in those cans and fast food wrappers.

### Plethora of products

Smart marketers (and researchers) now are working on a plethora of products with nutrient density similar to milk, but with the taste and appeal of soft drinks. I'm not talking fizzy milk here, but something more innovative that hasn't been done yet. As soon as the technology is in place, our food choices will follow and, with luck, the onslaught of chronic disease in this country will mitigate.

Why milk? Well, I may be preaching to the choir but it's backed by science. Milk and dairy foods deliver nutrition. Just read any popular magazine or science journal. Everything indicates that those with a high (3-a-day) dairy intake are in better health than those who con-

sume little to no dairy products.

When research catches up to how dairy does this trick, product developers will follow and it will be a blossoming market – not just for dairy proteins but also for milkfat, the most complex of all fats. There are things there that just can't be found anywhere else and they were put there by nature specifically to deliver nutrition and health. This also means understanding why milk is the only source of lactose. Nature intended that for a reason and we will soon learn why.

Getting back to the developing world, you'll find an interesting observation. You don't find anti-dairy groups in countries struggling to feed their populations or find balance in their diets. You also find a higher regard for milk among America's poorer populations. Why? They understand that milk is a key element to delivering good quality nutrition to their families.

### Two societies with challenges

In the end, you have two societies with nutritional challenges – both of which can be addressed by milk. Developing countries want dairy products to boost the nutritional and health status of their populations. Developed countries, having taken dairy products for granted, lost an appreciation for the contribution they make to a balanced diet. Now, with health prospects in serious decline in the United States, dairy products' value in maintaining health is gaining understanding.

Anti-dairy groups target dairy because of its size, with size comes prestige and money. Now that the nutritional status of our country is on the wane, we can no longer afford to dis dairy products as our arrogance has previously allowed. Dairy delivers nutrition and health – always has and always will.

What remains undiscovered by all populations is the science behind milk's ability to deliver nutrition and health. This is the focal point for global dairy research and the key to a reversal of declining public health in America and support for improved public health in developing countries. Choose milk instead of soft drinks (or hard drinks for that matter); cheese instead of fries; yogurt instead of candy bars; butter instead of chemically hydrogenated vegetable oil; and ice cream instead of cake. It's not that mysterious. Milk is the answer. ■

### FYI

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■ **Information on the California Dairy Research Foundation** can be obtained from the organization's web site at [www.cdrf.org](http://www.cdrf.org).