



Milk Matters

a column by Joseph O'Donnell

Milk is for people who think

"I for one, am not prepared to abandon 'thinking' to live in a world where everything is described as this food is for 'fill in the blank'."

Are you a baby calf? If you drink milk and you aren't, some would say there is something wrong with you. After all, isn't milk intended for baby calves? If that's the case, I wonder what carrots are meant for? Rabbits?

I know turnips were meant for someone other than me, and of course former President Bush is convinced broccoli was not intended for him. And what about those snails?

So what is meant to be eaten by humans? - Manna? Granted that system worked for 40 years, but it is not a factor in today's world or today's diet. Obviously, the notion that any particular food is intended for a specific consumer is ridiculous.

When the good Lord put us on this planet, He didn't leave us without resources to feed ourselves - the greatest being the human brain. Humans don't have big fangs, bulging muscles, claws or horns. Actually we are kind of wimpy regarding physical endowments.

What we do have is the intelligence to be innovative. It is our ingenuity that guides us to select all the foods of the earth and "process" them to become nourishment for our bodies. Who in their right mind would look at a cow turning worthless grass into the most nutrient dense and digestible material on the face of the earth and not think that harvesting that crop would represent a huge step in the daily chore of keeping body and soul together?

What I just described is a thought process - something that separates humans from other life forms. I, for one, am not prepared to abandon "thinking" to live in a world where everything is described as this food is for "fill in the blank." I can think; I can be innovative; I can be creative; AND I can constantly look at the world around me and think of ways to uncover its secrets.

If humans gave up being innovative not only would we show no progress, but we also would become extinct since our physical prowess simply can't get the job done. To those who say, "milk is for baby calves," I say, innovation is for humans and armed with that tool, people will constantly look for ways to optimize the resources given to them. We can "be fruitful and multiply" because we can think our way to survival.

Just how does our ingenuity apply to food sources? Virtually everything we eat required thinking in order for it to be considered food. Start with meat - actually anything that is mobile. As I pointed out earlier, humans don't have the tools to take on most animals. The ones that

are bigger, faster and stronger have obvious defenses. The little ones run off into holes, swim, fly away or, in some cases, produce toxins. Human innovation figured out how to trap, snare, hook, shoot, spear, rope or domesticate or whatever other means we use today to secure a regular supply of meat.

Every day farmers and ranchers use their brains to improve the productivity of animals. The world would be a sorry place to live without these foods. Go to nearly any developing country and the first thing they want to do as their economy improves is to eat better and that means adding animal-derived foods. The rest of the world is not like the United States where we have such abundance that we can take these foods for granted.

Plant-derived foods are another story. Plants can't run away. In order to survive, they need other means to discourage humans or any animal from eating it - everything from thorns to bitterness/bad flavor and toxins. These "everyday foods" sit on our tables as a result of humans who figured out how to take the belladonna out of tomatoes, cyanide out of apricots, enzyme inhibitors in soybeans, etc. - the list goes on to include all the products we eat from plants.

Finally, just a word about milk. Milk was designed by nature to optimize the delivery of health and nutrition. Scientists - not even those tied to the dairy industry - are studying how milk completes this mission so they might understand more thoroughly just how our bodies function. Milk requires no processing (although pasteurization is a nice safeguard against nasty things like pathogens that might find a home in milk). Nothing is wasted in nature and nature wastes nothing in milk. Every component has a job and most have several jobs related to delivering nutrition and health. To suggest that this resource is inappropriate for people to eat denies our human ability to convert the resources of this world into wholesome foods.

The notion that milk is for baby calves comes from the same cloth as man was not meant to fly or any number of controlling yet shallow dogma. This world is big enough to accommodate all manner of ideas and attitudes. But to deny that a human is intended to think, to use his or her brain in an attempt at nourishment or to support good health, is just wrong. Now you know how to confront those who are more interested in selling books and collecting speaker fees than in the health of our nation. ■

FYI

■ **Dr. Joseph O'Donnell** is executive director of the *California Dairy Research Foundation*. He can be reached at 530-753-0681.

■ Information on the *California Dairy Research Foundation* can be obtained from the organization's web site at www.cdrf.org.