



Milk Matters

a column by Joe O'Donnell

Ah, the power of the dairyman

After all, milk is a wholesome family beverage enjoyed in almost every American household.

It's a familiar scenario. Some guy is looking for a way to put bread on the table and hits upon the well-worn concept of becoming an expert. What better way to sell books and get paid to make speeches, he thinks.

All he needs is a topic that is near and dear to the hearts of everyone and a way to stir up controversy. It's the perfect formula for success and milk is the perfect target. After all, milk is a wholesome family beverage enjoyed in almost every American household. It has a long history of confidence from parents looking to provide the best nutrition for their families.

Dairytown, USA

With his strategy in place, our "expert" makes his way to Dairytown, USA, seeking to make his mark. It doesn't take long to spot a dairyman and put his plan into action.

We join this little scene in progress:

Expert: "Hey friend, are you a dairy farmer?"

Dairyman: "Yes, but only for three generations."

Expert: "Why do you do that? Don't you know that humans are the only species to drink the milk of other species?"

Dairyman: "Interesting. Humans are the only species to wear clothes, too. What's your point?"

Our "expert" is a little shaken at that comment, but he climbs back on his soapbox and proceeds.

Expert: "Milk is for calves – people shouldn't drink it."

Dairyman, sighing: "Have you considered the fact that milk is the only substance designed by nature to deliver nutrition and health? No other food we eat can make that claim."

Expert: "But..."

Dairyman, continuing, undeterred: "Take plants, for instance. It is in their best interest to avoid being eaten, but they can't run away. Instead, they develop other strategies to defend themselves such as toxins, thorns, a bitter taste, etc."

Expert: "What I mean is..."

Dairyman: "You make the point that humans are a unique species set apart by ingenuity, creativity and inventiveness. These traits are the secret to our survival. Over the years, we have had to figure out how to make food out of plants that inherently don't want to be eaten."

Expert: "Yes, but ..."

Dairyman: "This required learning how to breed or process plants in order to reduce their toxicity – such as reducing the belladonna in tomatoes, the cyanide in nuts or the enzyme inhibitors in soybeans – so we could eat them without killing ourselves. Today we have a number of fruit and vegetable choices, but it took a lot of human ingenuity to get there."

Expert: "What does this have to do with milk?"

Dairyman: "Listen, when humans needed to eat, they used their brains to find food or process it in order to fill their bellies without getting sick. Why, then, do you find it so mysterious that we recognized a perfect food when it was right in front of us? Many years ago, our ancestors observed that cows could convert useless grass to milk and their milk was a nourishing, healthy food. They recognized that this food could greatly improve nutrition and extend life."

Expert: "This is going nowhere..."

Dairyman: "Ah, but it is. The next step our forefathers took was to domesticate cattle and begin milking cows. As a result, their health was greatly improved. This is not rocket science. Take a look at developing countries. As soon as their economic status improves, they want to improve their health and they begin adding animal protein to their diets."

Expert: "How..."

Dairyman: "This is a no-brainer and so is anyone who is so removed from the history of agriculture and civilization that they deny the very traits that make us human and are responsible for our very survival."

Expert: "But..."

Dairyman: "I'm sure your argument is well received in other places – but you'll need to pack up your soapbox and find an audience that forgot or never knew the role dairy products play in human health and survival. You'll not find it here. Enjoy your tofu, but remember that stuff would kill you if it weren't for the human ingenuity that learned how to destroy its toxins. Have a good day."

The last time we saw our expert, he was blending grass in a soft drink muttering, "If cows can do it, so can I."

Looking back, he never had a chance. ■

FYI

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