Grass-fed dairy cows changing the flavor of milk

By Mary Ladd, KQED-TV

School is almost back in session, and the consumption and purchase of milk will rise predictably, according to Mike Griffin, the California Pool Manager for Organic Valley.

The company is the country's largest dairy cooperative headquartered in Wisconsin and it recently marked its 25th anniversary. Organic Valley has a substantial number of farmer members in California and all the milk sold in California is produced by cows that reside in-state.

Last year, Organic Valley launched an organic grassmilk product line, which consists of milk from cows fed a 100 percent grass diet. This milk is produced in Humboldt County, which has an exceptionally long grass season. When fresh grass is not available, the cows are fed dry forages like hay.

Jim Regli, his wife, Susan, and their seven children are in the Organic Valley cooperative, and their farm has been in the family for several generations. The decision to try producing grassmilk made sense when Regli analyzed it: "We already had cows on pasture. The economics looked like we'd get a stable pay price with grassmilk."

Stability may be a draw even if this is the first wave of grassmilk production.

Before joining Organic Valley, the Reglis were a part of the Humboldt Creamery, which went bankrupt. Regli saw in grassmilk "a perfect opportunity. I always wanted to do this and saw the economics as a way to be more profitable. Our grain bill was huge and grain prices continue to go up. Buying alfalfa pellets for the grass is half or two-thirds the cost of what

our grain bill was.”

Savvy grocery shoppers who are comfortable seeking out items like grass-fed beef, biodynamic wine and similar smaller batch items may want to keep a look out for this new product which shows signs of being a new trend. Look for the picture of an adorable and sweet looking brown Jersey cow in the dairy section and you’ve found it: organic grassmilk, which gets its name from the food source and has a suggested retail price of $5.49 for a half gallon.

Not surprisingly, Whole Foods Markets nabbed first mover status for grassmilk, with an assist from the Northern California farmers in the Humboldt County of Ferndale that are a part of Organic Valley. Eleanor Bertino, who organized a media tour of Organic Valley, said “Most organic milk drinkers want their milk from grass-fed cows but demand outpaces supply.”

With beef, flavor and the animal’s health are among the reasons a consumer is willing to pay more for a grass-fed product. The theory there is that buying grass-fed beef gives eaters a meal without antibiotics and added hormones, and many find the meat flavor to be slightly sweeter and more nuanced with grass. In a similar fashion, the theory is that Organic Valley cows grazing on grass grown in quality soil will produce higher quality grassmilk. Griffin said that even the sweetness via the sugar levels of the grass can be measured with a field tool called a refractometer, to make sure the grass is appealing to the cows. These cows simply won’t eat or touch the grass when the refractometer says the sugar levels are too low in the grass.

Organic Valley Grassmilk is from Jersey cows, which are known to produce milk that is higher in fat – expect a natural richness and subtle sweetness. The nutrients in grassmilk come from the cow’s ability to process the grass and forage on the dairy farm, which means there are naturally occurring

omega-3s, conjugated linoleic acid (CLA) and calcium in each sip. Grassmilk is not raw milk. Organic Valley says the milk is minimally pasteurized and non-homogenized – which is likely for good reason: raw milk has it's share of proponents but is not even close to being mainstream (raw milk folks operate clandestine operations in some states to receive and distribute the product). Without pasteurization milk can harbor bacteria along the lines of Campylobacter, Listeria, and E. coli.

When I sampled the grassmilk it had an old-fashioned and even wholesome feel brought on by a sweeter and richer taste than my usual 1 percent cow's milk or experiments with way-too-watery rice milk. Grassmilk reminded me of sneaking tastes while making butter in school when I was an East Bay youngster. The small buttery bits (you could honestly call some of them chunks) in grassmilk may at first be a surprise since they float to the top and are clearly visible. Take time to savor the bits, though, because they offer hints of sweet butter and even clotted cream. Dipping scones, thick cookies or other breakfast-y baked goods are a natural fit with grassmilk but it also tastes good with cereal or the other ways you routinely drink milk.

Northstar preps for annual food and wine fest

The 28th annual Lake Tahoe Autumn Food and Wine Festival at Northstar will pair savory adventures with the regional food and wine delicacies.

The Sept. 6-8 event includes cooking seminars and

demonstrations, culinary competitions, wine tastings, food-themed excursions and more.

Events include the Gourmet Marketplace Vendor Fair, Village Wine and Brew Walk, Blazing Pans Mountain Chef Cook Off and the Charbay Annual Release Party. Other additions include the Goose Island Craft Beer and Artisan Cheese Pairing, Live Concert with Joe Craven, cooking demonstrations with TV chef Nathan Lyon, and a raw foods seminar with raw chef Steph.

A complete list of events is available online.

FDA creates standards for gluten-free food

By Sabrina Tavernise, New York Times

WASHINGTON – The federal government on Friday set a standard for gluten-free claims on food labels, a step that health officials said would help the three million Americans with celiac disease and bring uniformity to the $4 billion market for gluten-free products.

Gluten is a composite of starch and proteins found in certain grassy grains like wheat, barley and rye. When eaten by people with celiac disease, gluten can trigger the production of antibodies that damage the lining of the small intestine.

To protect people with the disease, Congress passed a law in 2004 calling on the Food and Drug Administration to set standards for how much trace gluten could be in foods whose labels said they were gluten free. A standard became even more

urgent, observers said, when broader consumer demand for gluten-free foods drove the rapid expansion of the market.

Read the whole story

U.S. beef supply at 21-year low

By Elizabeth Campbell, Bloomberg

U.S. beef production is plunging to a 21-year low after surging feed costs spurred ranchers to cut herds, signaling record prices for consumers and higher costs for buyers from McDonald’s Corp. to Ruth’s Chris Steak House.

Production in the U.S. will decline 4.9 percent to 10.93 million metric tons in 2014, retreating for a fourth year, the government says. The herd on July 1 was the smallest for that date since at least 1973, according to the average of four analyst estimates compiled by Bloomberg. The most-active cattle futures will rise 6.1 percent to $1.33 a pound next year, a level last seen in February, the median of nine forecasts shows.

McDonald’s, the world’s largest restaurant chain, probably will pay 2.5 percent to 3.5 percent more for beef this year, according to Jack Russo, a St. Louis-based analyst at Edward Jones & Co.

Global meat prices rose 2.1 percent in June, the most in nine months, while the overall cost of food dropped 0.9 percent to the lowest since February, United Nations data show.

Ranchers still haven’t recovered from last year’s drought that

sent grain costs to a record and spurred them to slaughter more cattle. While feed costs are now slumping as U.S. farms prepare to reap the biggest corn crop ever, it takes more than two years to raise enough animals to expand supply. Retail ground-beef prices in June were up 13 percent from a year earlier and near a record set in January.

“The drought has really affected the cow herd,” said Tucker Hughes, a 65-year-old rancher in Stanford, Mont., who predicted the number of animals he retains for breeding may drop as much as 20 percent over the next two years. “Some people had to downsize their herds. When you get these droughts, you have to reduce your numbers.”

Mini fasts may help with weight loss

By Allison Aubrey, NPR

This is not a detox diet. Nor is it an extreme version of calorie restriction.

Nope, the strategy of so-called 5-2 diets is to endure two days a week of mini-fasting.

This doesn’t mean starving yourself. Rather, it entails reducing your calorie intake during two days of the week down to somewhere in the range of 500 to 1,000 calories.

The idea of intermittent mini-fasting seems to be gaining traction. One version of the diet is being popularized by Michael Mosley, a British physician and journalist who’s written a bestselling book called the Fast Diectand produced a

documentary.

And there are other popular tomes on the topic. Take for instance, the 5:2 Diet Book, which claims you can boost your brain power and transform your health by feasting for five days and fasting for two.

Read the whole story

Kitchens may be a pollution hazard

By Peter Andrey Smith, New York Times

By midmorning, the smell of hot peanut oil dissipated and inside the tightly sealed laboratory known as Building 51F, a pink hamburger sizzled in a pan over a raging gas flame. Overhead, fans whirred, whisking caustic smoke up through a metallic esophagus of ductwork.

Woody Delp, 49, a longhaired engineer in glasses – the Willie Nelson of HVAC – supervised the green bean and hamburger experiments. He sat at a computer inside a kitchen simulator, rows upon rows of numeric data appearing on his screen, ticking off the constituents of the plume sucked up the flue. A seared hamburger patty, as he sees it, is just a reliable source for indoor pollution.



Veronica, Pam and Cleo cook several dishes. Photo/LTN file

“I can claim Alice Waters’ influenced the recipe,” he said. “It’s all fresh and local.”

But Delp and his colleagues aren’t really interested in testing recipes. They are scientists at the Energy Department’s Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, and the morning’s experiment concerned another kitchen conundrum, a fight against physics: how to remove harmful contaminants caused by cooking.

Simply put, cooking is an act of controlled combustion – you set oil, fat, and carbohydrates on fire. As a health hazard, incinerating hamburgers and green beans may pale in comparison with lighting wood or coal fires indoors, the leading environmental cause of death and disability around the world. Yet frying, grilling or toasting foods with gas and electric appliances creates particulate matter, nitrogen dioxide, carbon monoxide and carbon dioxide, and volatile organic compounds. (Acrolein, which most cooks recognize as the smell of burnt fats or oils, was used in grenades in World War I because it causes irritation to the lungs and eyes.)

Read the whole story

Corn can be used in desserts

By Melissa Clark, Los Angeles Times

Ripe summer corn is as sweet as many of the fruits we habitually make into dessert, but rarely do we see it at the end of the meal.

This isn’t at all true in Mexico, where corn ice cream is a year-round tradition. Or in Vietnam and Thailand, where the kernels are often stirred into sugary coconut-milk puddings. Or in the Philippines, where they’re paired with sweet and milky shaved ice.

But here in the United States, the kernels are generally savory fare, even though we use plenty of cornmeal in pastries and cakes.

Not so at my house. During the height of corn season, I try to eat as much fresh corn as possible, desserts included. Homemade corn ice cream is a staple, and has been ever since my very first spoonful.

Read the whole story

Workshop focuses on selling homegrown products

Two new laws that went into effect in Nevada this month are sparking a lot of interest, especially among those involved

with the local foods movement. The laws provide farmers, home growers, home cooks and others with increased opportunities to produce and sell their products locally, as well as to hold dinners featuring their homegrown products.

University of Nevada Cooperative Extension has convened a panel of local and national experts to explain the legislation, provide guidance and answer questions at a workshop on Aug. 12 from 9am-4pm.

The workshop will be in Las Vegas, but people throughout the state will be able to participate at several other locations via videoconference.

The workshop is part of Cooperative Extension's Tomorrow's Table Program geared toward helping Nevada growers who are new to agriculture or are interested in diversifying their current farming and ranching activities.

Presentations in the morning focus on AB206, the Cottage Foods legislation that clears the way for home cooks and farmers to make and sell up to $35,000 in products such as baked goods, jams, vinegars, dry herbs and more, without the requirement of a commercial kitchen. The afternoon discussions will focus on AB200, the Farm to Fork legislation that allows farmers to hold up to two dinners a month featuring their products, without forcing the farmers to qualify as food establishments and comply with all the accompanying regulations.

The registration fee for the all-day workshop is $20 and includes lunch. Two people per farm may attend for the $20 registration fee. To register or for more information, contact Becky Holys at (702) 397.2604, ext. 0 or holysr@unce.unr.edu.

FDA wants to enforce standards for imported food

By Sabrina Tavernise, New York Times

WASHINGTON — The Food and Drug Administration proposed sweeping new rules on Friday that would require food importers like Walmart and Cargill to make sure that their foreign growers and processors were following American food safety standards to prevent contamination in an increasingly globalized food supply.

About 15 percent of food that Americans eat comes from abroad, including nearly two-thirds of fresh fruits and vegetables.

The rules, if made final, would shift the responsibility for ensuring that food is safe from the FDA to companies. American companies would have to prove that their foreign suppliers had controls in place through actions like auditing the foreign facilities, testing food, and reviewing records. American importers would have to keep their own records on foreign suppliers. They would be allowed to hire outside auditors to make on-site inspections.

These are the last major rules needed to implement the Food Safety and Modernization Act, a landmark law passed by Congress in 2010 that was the first significant update of the agency's food safety authority in 70 years. The administration has been criticized for not moving more quickly to carry out the law. The first set of rules, which applied to domestic producers, was proposed in January. The new rules proposed Friday exempt importers of seafood and fruit juices.

Read the whole story

Fast food talking to chefs about increasing nutrition

By Stephanie Strom, New York Times

ST. HELENA — The chicken thighs, smoked for two hours, then soaked in buttermilk spiked with Crystal hot sauce and dredged in flour, turned a perfect golden brown, full of the promise of succulence and crunch, under the stern watch of Chef H. Alexander Talbot.

But not one, alas, went into a salivating mouth as soon as it left the bubbling rice bran oil. Rather, it was rushed under a glass "udder" bristling with slender filaments and tended by technicians, who would soon analyze it at a PepsiCo lab in Illinois for the magic that gave it such flavor and crispiness.

Other creations, destined for the same lab, went into Styrofoam containers bedded on dry ice, part of a continuing effort to find new ways to improve the nutritional quality of the giant food company's products without losing recognizable flavors.

"The challenge facing us and other big food companies today is not easy: to have a great-tasting product without as much salt, fat and sugar," said Greg Yep, senior vice president for long-term research and development at PepsiCo. "Chefs have ways of tricking the taste buds that we can use in our products."

Prodded by consumers, regulators and politicians, major food companies like PepsiCo are under extraordinary pressure to make healthier foods. Kellogg has cut as much as 30 percent of

the sugar in children’s cereals like Apple Jacks and Froot Loops, removed salt from others and increased fiber. Taco Bell last month announced a new Power Protein menu that will include items with less fat and calories, and other companies are rushing to get their products in shape.

“We’re not only thinking about making great-tasting foods but about the nutrition guidelines we need to deliver on,” said Greg Creed, chief executive of Taco Bell, referring to the company’s pledge to bring one-third of the meal options in its restaurants into compliance with the federal dietary guidelines by 2020. “This is a huge change in mind-set.”

Read the whole story