

Udder Perspective

By RON JOHNSON



Tasting Panel Compares Products Made From 'Conventional' and Pasture-Based Milk

An event at Madison last week was something new for me. I was invited to participate in a "Grass-fed Dairy Tasting" at the state agriculture department building.

Organizer Laura Paine, the department's grazing and organic ag specialist, invited me and several others to gather in the conference room to taste several dishes made with "conventional" milk and milk from pastured cows. Along with the pleasure of trying the various foods, I felt obliged to jot down a few notes, so I could share my "findings" with you.

Paine, who raises pastured beef, pointed out that there are "physical and chemical differences in the milk" from pastured cows compared to those not pastured. The tasting was, she said, part of an effort to try to "quantify" those differences and see just how milk from grass-fed cows does in different products.

I won't get into the complex topics of conjugated linoleic acids (CLAs), omega-3 fatty acids and all the other substances that are lurking in the milk from grass-fed cows. Plenty has been written about that already.

Instead, I'll get right to the "cream" of the event — the dishes and how they were received and perceived by me and some of the other panelists. I'll point out that two professional chefs were tapped to prepare everything. They are Leah Caplan, with Field to Fork Culinary Consulting, and Jack Kaestner, from Oconomowoc Lake Club.

Milk from grass-fed cows for the products came from Edelweiss Graziers Cooperative, Monticello. That co-op was represented by dairyman Bert Paris and several other farmers.

The "conventional" milk came from Sassy Cow Creamery, Columbus. "Conventional" means the milk came from cows fed stored feed.

We sampled seven items, as seven courses. I must admit it was odd to nibble and try to tease out differences in not only taste, but color, aroma, texture and mouth feel. I'm not used to doing that. Nor am I accustomed to taking 90 minutes to eat. But I reminded myself that it was all in the name of science, so I "suffered" in silence.

Our first tasting involved pasta with

browned butter sauce. I tentatively sampled the dish made with butter made from "conventional" milk and found it okay, but decided to immediately compare it to the one with the butter made from the milk of pastured cows.

The difference was noticeable — so noticeable that I decided to not even bother with the somewhat-bland first pasta sample and concentrate on the one with the butter made from grass-fed cows' milk. Paine was asking for comments from us all the while, so I said that if I was in a restaurant and knew beforehand what the two pasta dishes tasted like, I would not bother with the first one, but I would order the second one — the one with the butter made from pastured cows' milk.

Our second tasting was of two types of butter — one made from "conventional" milk, the other from the milk of pastured cows. (I'm trying to avoid the easy term of "grass-fed milk" here, because the milk was not "fed" anything; the cows were).

Each type of butter came on a small slice of French bread. The first noticeable difference was that the butter from pastured cows was yellower. It was also softer to the touch.

But, I have to admit that I found the "conventional" butter tasted more like the butter I am used to. That's not to say I didn't care for the pastured-cow butter. It's just that my taste buds apparently are not accustomed to it. I can see, however, why some folks might prefer that butter. It's certainly more visually appealing.

Next we tried fresh vegetables with a drinkable, yogurt-based salad dressing. During this dish I was conversing with a grazing specialist seated next to me.

As I tried the dressing made with "conventional" milk, nothing remarkable happened. But as soon as I switched to the dressing made the grass-fed cow milk, flavors suddenly appeared.

We moved on to fish (a small rectangle of halibut) with two samples of a hot butter sauce. There's a fancy, French name for this dish, but I can't spell it, let alone pronounce it. Besides, the name does not affect the flavor.

Both cold butters were good, but the one made from the milk of pastured

cows again stood out — at least to me. It seemed creamier, and the taste lingered longer.

Next came two samples of frozen yogurt. The one made with conventional milk seem sharper — almost sour. The one made with the milk of pastured cows seemed more subtle, and it looked darker. For the record, I wasn't crazy about either of those. But then I'm not crazy about frozen yogurt anyway.

Next up: shortbread. For our male readers, shortbread is a type of cookie. Yeah, I didn't know what it was, either.

Here, I definitely liked the cookie made with conventional butter better. It was moister, chewier, much less crumbly — and much less messy.

Our last treat was a small sample of cake with a butter cream frosting. I found the frosting made with butter from pastured cows' milk a bit more yellow, but otherwise there was not much difference. Both cakes and the frostings were excellent, though. Maybe after an hour-and-a-half of being bombarded by all these unaccustomed flavors my poor taste buds were simply worn out.

Some of us wondered aloud whether any flavor difference might have been due to different preparation methods. No, the chefs told us. They made each of the two samples with the same ingredients and with the same amounts of ingredients.

This whole topic of different flavors and cooking characteristics from dairy products made with the milk from pastured cows is, fascinating. I'm told more research will go into this, and I hope there's a way for dairy farmers to profit.

Now for my disclaimer: I am definitely NOT saying that dairy products made from so-called "conventional" milk are inferior. Nor am I saying that dairy products made from the milk of pastured cows are superior. What I am saying is that sometimes there are differences.

I'll wrap up by thanking Laura Paine for inviting me to be a part of the tasting panel. While I'm at it, I'll ask Laura if she knows of a quick-and-easy way for me to drop the two pounds (at least) that I'm sure I gained from participating.

Briefs

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producers tips on how to recognize potential issues in calf rearing areas.

Following the seminar, producers can participate in a learning station tour at the calf facility. Speakers will be stationed at various locations to demonstrate ventilation, calf care, and troubleshooting.

The registration fee is \$25 per person and includes lunch, refreshments, and materials. For more information or to register, contact Aerica Opatik, 920-388-7138; e-mail aerica.opatik@ces.uwex.edu.

Processors Against Dairy Support Price Increases

Responding to a decision to fund additional USDA purchases of nonfat dry milk and cheddar cheese, the International Dairy Foods Association (IDFA) has asked Congress to find better ways to help dairy farmers than to use government spending to increase dairy prices that they say will ultimately be paid by U.S. consumers. In a letter sent to Senators, IDFA President and CEO Connie Tipton asked the lawmakers to reconsider the proposal to add \$350 million for USDA purchases of dairy products under the Dairy Product Price Support Program. "We appreciate that under existing dairy programs, USDA has already provided significant financial support for dairy farmers," Tipton said. "Direct payments to dairy farmers this year under the Milk Income Loss Contract program are expected to exceed \$1 billion."

IDFA says it believes additional government purchases of nonfat dry milk and cheddar will have negative consequences for dairy farmers, manufacturing companies and consumers. In her letter, Tipton said a price support increase will result in higher costs for USDA food and nutrition programs at a time when more people depend on those programs. She added that the proposal will most likely prolong the low price period by encouraging more milk production and will discourage the industry from seeking long-term solutions to milk pricing.

"The USDA has already spent nearly \$300 million this fiscal year to buy and store more than 270 million pounds of nonfat dry milk and nearly 5 million pounds of butter under this program," said Tipton. Rather than adding another \$350 million to the Dairy Product Price Support Program, IDFA urged Senators to consider using those funds to: Make more milk available to school

management programs for dairy farmers; and Include yogurt as an eligible dairy product in the supplemental program for women, infants and children.

Roth Käse Wins Five Cheese Awards

Roth Käse USA cheeses won five awards at the 2009 American Cheese Society Competition in Austin, Texas, including three blue ribbons for Valfino, St. Otho, and GranQueso. This year's competition drew a record-breaking 1,327 entries from 197 companies in 32 U.S. states, as well as Canada and Mexico.

Valfino, a velvety semisoft cheese with a dynamic flavor profile rich in beefiness, earthiness and a hint of spice and fruit, took top honors in the American Originals (cow's milk) category. St. Otho, a lowfat, washed-rind cheese hand made in small batches, earned first place in the lowfat/low-salt category. Rounding out the triple blue ribbon play was GranQueso, which has won top honors in the Hispanic and Portuguese-style category six years in a row.

Roth Käse USA also won a second-place ribbon for Petite Swiss in the American-made/international-style category, and third place in the flavored cheeses category for Peppadew Havarti.

Sartori Reserve Takes Top Honors

Wisconsin artisan cheesemaker Sartori Foods has won top honors in four categories at the American Cheese Society's annual competition. "The results of this prestigious competition validate our efforts in creating and producing world class cheese," said Jim Sartori, third-generation owner of the nationally acclaimed company.

The four winners in their respective categories include: Sartori Reserve SarVecchio Asiago (hard Italian cheese), Sartori Reserve Pastoral Blend (international style), Sartori Reserve Black Pepper BellaVitano (flavored cheese), and Sartori Reserve Merlot BellaVitano (marinated cheese).

In the same week, Sartori Reserve Pastoral Blend claimed the grand champion award for the entire Wisconsin State Fair competition, having also won the individual mixed-milk category. Additionally, Mike Matucheski, one of Sartori's cheesemakers, was recognized as the "grand master cheesemaker" for Wisconsin. Sartori garnered top honors in three categories while claiming seven awards overall, and

CWT Audit Have Begun

CWT's file are visiting the 294 farms that tentatively a the program's retirement. auditors con task — likely of September cows that pr billion poun will have bee from the nati herd. Seventy cent of the far are east of the River, while of the 87,000 retired com West and S Seventy-two the milk ren come from regions.

Both the average size (296 cow average prod cow (20,884 p the highest of herd retirem has carried o ing that "the just small farr end cows that soon been go These are, in n larger herds v cant potential production th removing in or bring supply line with den Tillison, CWT said.

CWT is also approximately heifers, nearly the next high ber since the added to the ment program. Farmers biddi round will be Aug. 31 as tc their bids were

Task Force Probes Milk Pricing Proposal

The National Producers Federation (NMPF) Strategic Planning Task Force further analyzed proposals to offer long-term solutions to low milk prices. The group conducted more information regarding the effects of dairy imports on the domestic market. The task force also evaluated the impact of the proposed program. The group also agreed to a plan to reform milk marketing, eliminating market power.

The task force presented with research reported by Bain and Company on how the U.S. dairy fits into the global dairy system, that role may depend on the