



Commonly Asked Questions on Farm Tours

ANIMAL CARE

Q: Shouldn't all dairy cows graze on pastures versus being confined to feedlot operations?

A: No. In fact, there is no evidence that one feeding method – grazing vs. feedlot – is more beneficial to animals than another. Farmers must choose what works best for their operation. I choose to ... (describe your cow feeding plan). Most dairy farms allow cows to move between the barn and other parts of the farm for milking, feeding and grazing.

- For both grazing and on-farm feeding operations, proper animal care is important to dairy farmers as cows must be healthy and well-cared for in order to produce pure, wholesome milk.
- Many farmers house their animals in freestall barns, meaning their cows are able to move about to eat, drink or rest whenever they like. These barns provide easy access to feed and clean water, as well as shade and protection from bad weather.
- Dairy farmers feed their cows a balanced and nutritious diet to ensure that they produce wholesome, high-quality milk. I feed my cows a specially formulated ration... *(provide details, e.g., was it developed by an animal nutritionist?)*

Q: Do cows get to go outside?

A: Cows are most comfortable when the temperature is between 40 and 50 degrees. When it's too hot, cows can suffer from heat stress, and if it's too cold, they can sustain frostbite. Many farmers house their animals in temperature-controlled freestall barns, which provides the cows easy access to food and clean water, as well as shade and protection from bad weather. Some farmers do graze their cows, and on a hot day, you may see groups of cows finding shade under a stand of trees to keep cool.

Q: What is the average lifespan of a dairy cow? Has it decreased in recent years?

A: The average lifespan of today's dairy cows is 6-7 years old. Most dairy cows are milked for three lactation cycles during their lives. Their lifespan has not decreased in recent years.

Q: Why are the cows so skinny/have bones showing?

A: Dairy cows are designed to produce milk, and so much of their energy is being used to produce milk rather than build muscle and fat on their body. Dairy cows are fed a diet that is formulated to meet their nutritional needs, so they are receiving the nutrients needed for them to be healthy.

Q: Why do dairy farmers remove the horns from cows? Doesn't this hurt the animal?

A: Farmers dehorn animals because horns can be very dangerous to other cows in the herd, as well as to the farmers and other workers caring for the animals.

- The vast majority of dairy farmers work closely with their veterinarian to dehorn animals using anesthesia and other humane methods.
- Dairy farmers are committed to the health and comfort of each dairy cow they milk, as cows must be healthy and well cared for in order to produce pure, wholesome milk.

Q: Why do you ear-tag animals?

A: Dairy farmers are committed to the health and well-being of each cow. Applying an ear tag, which is similar to ear piercing with little or no discomfort, is done so that dairy farmers can identify cows with numerical ear tags for ongoing monitoring of each cow's individual health and diet.

- Dairy farmers keep health and nutrition records on each cow. For my herd, I keep records by ... *(describe your record keeping process, e.g., notebook, laptop, palm pilot, or special ear tags or RFID tags.)*
- Herd records are shared with the farmers' veterinarian during his/her bi-weekly and monthly visits to the farm.

Q: Why are dairy calves separated from their mothers?

A: Dairy calves are kept in separate pens to ensure optimal care and monitoring – just like babies are kept separated in hospital nurseries.

Q: How are cows and calves cared for during the birthing process and afterwards?

A: Dairy farmers provide comfortable, safe and clean conditions for both mother and calf during the birthing process and afterward. Just prior to giving birth, the pregnant cow is housed in a special pen where she is given individual care and attention. During calving, a close eye is kept on both mother and calf to ensure the health of both animals. Dairy farmers, their employees or their veterinarians are available to help if needed.

Q: Do milking machines hurt?

A: No. Dairy cows must be healthy and well cared for in order to produce pure, wholesome milk. Therefore, automatic milking machines are designed with cow well-being in mind. Automatic milking machines enable dairy farmers to milk their herds at regular times each day, ensuring cow comfort. A dairy farmer always monitors the milking process.

Q: Videos have appeared showing animal abuse. What did you think of these?

A: No animal should be subjected to abuse. Caring for animals is dairy farmers' top priority. Their health and well-being is a dairy farmer's priority every day. The public can be assured that farmers care for their herd by providing a nutritious diet, good medical care and healthy living conditions.

Q: Do dairy farmers care what happens to their cows once they leave the farm? Is anyone looking out for the welfare of these animals?

A: Yes, dairy farmers care very much about the treatment of their animals, both on and off the farms. Cows on farms receive a nutritious diet, good medical care and healthy living conditions. Farmers expect their animals to receive the same good care once they leave their farm.

ENVIRONMENT

Q: What are manure lagoons and why are they needed?

A: Sometimes called lagoons, holding ponds or retention ponds, they are an important part of modern dairy sanitation, water recycling and manure management. Storage lagoons can be in the form of glass-lined steel tanks, lined earthen pits, or recyclable wastewater ponds. Manure storage facilities for permitted farms (CAFOs) must be designed and built according to accepted engineering standards. Most dairy cattle are fed and sheltered in freestall barns: roofed, wall-less structures with concrete flooring to allow efficient cleaning. Freestall barns are regularly flushed to maintain a clean, healthy environment for the cows. The flush water and manure from the freestall barns is collected in retention ponds. The retention pond is not the final stop for manure. The nutrients and flush water are temporarily stored in the specially designed ponds until they can be re-used. When the crops need water, the nutrient-enriched pond water is used to irrigate. So, water that has already been used to cool milk tanks and in other processes on the dairy is recycled to flush alleys, then goes on to irrigate and fertilize crops.

Q: What are you doing to protect the land, air and water?

A: As dairy farmers who live on or near the land that our families farm, we understand the importance of protecting our natural resources. We depend on this land for our business and our quality of life. There are many factors that affect the environment and it will take all of us working together to keep our water and air clean. From a farmer's perspective, innovative and effective options for managing nutrients are critical to the future improvement of air and water quality and public health. As an industry, we are working on it every day. Examples on my farm include... (cite specifics on how you protect the environment).

MILK SAFETY

Q: Why do farmers give animals antibiotics and other medicines?

A: Similar to people, a variety of Food and Drug Administration-approved medicines are available to farmers, either over-the-counter or through veterinarian prescriptions to help control, prevent and treat illnesses in dairy cows – it's about the welfare of the animal. And, similar to human medicine, animal medicines go through extensive trials and testing – and all medicines must be approved by the FDA's Center for Veterinary Medicine before

they can be used. Federal law requires dairy farmers to follow a milk withdrawal time that is determined by how many days it takes the cow to process the antibiotic that was used. This means that a dairy cow's milk is only collected for human use after it is healthy and antibiotics have fully cleared its system. Until then, the cow's milk is discarded in accordance with state regulations.

Q: What antibiotics are tested for in milk?

A: Currently, the FDA requires that all milk – conventional and organic – be tested for commonly used antibiotics when it arrives at the milk plant. This includes “beta-lactam” medicines such as penicillin, ampicillin and amoxicillin. A complementary federal program also randomly tests for less commonly used medicines. Under a comprehensive program overseen by the FDA and implemented by individual state regulatory authorities, the U.S. dairy community conducts nearly 4 million tests annually on all milk that enters dairy plants to ensure that antibiotics are kept out of the nation's milk supply. The most recent report by the FDA affirms there were NO antibiotics found in milk. In fact, since 2011, the annual FDA reports state that ZERO milk products heading to retail have tested positive for traces of antibiotics.

Q: Are there artificial hormones in milk?

A: All milk contains naturally occurring hormones. Milk from cows given commercial rBST is no longer being accepted by milk processors in the State of Michigan, so all milk is free of rBST. There is no difference between organic and regular milk. Both contain the same unique package of nutrients that makes dairy products an important part of a healthy diet. An 8-ounce serving of organic or regular milk offers the same amount of nine essential nutrients, including calcium, vitamin D and potassium.

Q: Is organic milk safer than regular milk?

A: No. Strict government standards ensure that regular milk is just as pure, safe and nutritious as organic milk. According to the USDA and to the American Dietetic Association (ADA) conventionally produced food is equally as safe as organically produced food.

Q: Is organic milk more nutritious than regular milk?

A: No. Both types of milk are equally nutritious. If you check the nutrition facts label on both regular and organic milk, you will find that both contain the same unique package of nine essential nutrients (including calcium, vitamin D and potassium) that makes dairy products an important part of a healthy diet.