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Happy June Dairy Month

By LEE MIELKE
For the Capital Press

The ere we are at another June Dairy Month and most consumers don't give it a second thought. They have never seen a day that they walked into their local grocery store and found the dairy case empty. And, probably never will.

Like so many things in this country, we take it for granted and we assume there'll always be rows and rows of gallon jugs of milk sitting there, as well as the numerous varieties of cheese proudly displayed, and the awesome selection of premium ice creams in flavors we may never have even heard of.

But, while consumers are never really concerned about the future of the dairy industry "because they get their milk at the grocery store," dairy farmers walk a very fine financial line every day, especially considering where milk prices are today compared to the record highs of just two years ago.

Plus, they face an ever-increasing threat from so-called environmental activists, many of whom have a vegetarian agenda.

June Dairy Month 2014 saw U.S. dairy farmers in a position they hadn't been in many years, with on-farm milk prices that actually paid the bills, but they were shortlived.

Those prices set record highs and provided badly needed relief from the last painful lows, which occurred in 2009 and put many operations out of business.

There are bright spots for dairy farmers today and dairy products are as popular as

Butter has been exonerated

Dairy Markets

Lee Mielke



and is replacing margarine as the spread of choice at home and in fast food chains, which now proudly boast of their use of butter in today's menus.

Whole milk sales have also seen positive growth as new health studies show that dairy fat is not the demon it was once made out to be.

Unfortunately, fluid milk consumption overall is still slipping but there have been some promising powerful new efforts even by non-dairy companies to stem the tide and bring consumers back to the milk beverage category so fluid milk consumption has not been surrendered.

Cheese consumption remains strong in the United States but we still have a ways to catch up to many other countries in the world in per capita consumption. New product innovations will hopefully boost that category even more.

The song many years ago said, "The times, they are a-changing," and they are. A very small percentage of the U.S. population today is involved in agriculture or even has ties with it, a huge contrast to what it was not that long ago.

But consumers still have an affinity for the farm, and farmers, for the most part, are held in high regard.

Consumers also have a new zeal to know more about their food, where their food is coming from and how it is produced. Dairy has an excellent story to tell and is doing so.

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