

# More fat may mean more nutrition in milk

Others say Americans should stick to low- and non-fat options



Sarah Carnell shops with her daughter Miriam at the Happy Cow Creamery store in Pelzer, S.C. The store sells Happy Cow milk products as well as grass-fed beef, cheeses and organic produce.

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**By Shannon Casas**  
[scasas@gainesvilletimes.com](mailto:scasas@gainesvilletimes.com)  
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**PELZER, S.C.** — Driving up to a dairy like Happy Cow Creamery to get a gallon of milk isn't much like picking one up at your local grocery store.

First, there's the smell.

It's a dairy farm, so there are cows, flies and that "farm" scent.

But there's also fresh, whole, nonhomogenized milk. That isn't much like your local grocery store either.

There are dairy farms around North Georgia, but not many sell individual bottles of milk. Instead, many sell their milk to a larger company for processing and packaging.

Jerry Truelove of Truelove Dairy in Clermont said milk there is tested for basic nutritional value every time it's picked up. The milk is then shipped to Maryland & Virginia Milk Producers Cooperative Association where it is processed before being sold to stores like Kroger.

Milk sold in grocery stores has its benefits, but Tom Trantham, owner of Happy Cow Creamery in Pelzer, S.C., said though many conventional dairy farms supplement feed with grain and hay, his method of growing seasonal grasses and keeping the cows grass fed all year makes his milk even more nutritious.

## A healthy debate

Shake your gallon of Happy Cow milk and pour, and you've got a glass full of tasty milk. You've also got a glass full of healthy conjugated linoleic acids, which have been shown to prevent cancer, along with balanced omega-3 and omega-6 fats, enzymes, beta carotene and natural vitamins A and D. Not to mention calcium and other vitamins generally present in milk.

Trantham said his milk was tested by Utah State University and shown to be "an ultimate quality milk." Compared to an organic dairy in California, milk from Happy Cow Creamery had more CLAs and had perfectly balanced omega-3 and omega-6 fats.

But conjugated linoleic acids are a fatty acid, so in order to consume more of them, you've got to consume more fat, too.

"The range of these conjugated linoleic acids in fluid milk is anywhere from 3.3 mg to 6.4 mg per gram of fat," said Betsy Dietsch, a registered dietitian and program account manager with the Southeast United Dairy Industry Association Inc. "Now, the range is much higher in cheese and in butter because there's more fat. The range is determined by how much just occurs naturally in the milk and then of course whatever the final fat amount is."

So is it worth consuming the extra fat to get CLAs? That's up for debate.

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## More fat may mean more nutrition in milk

Conjugated linoleic acids have been shown to protect against some cancers, help with bone health and protect against heart disease, Dietsch said. She still recommends low fat and skim milk, but said it is up to consumers and what they want out of their milk.

Trantham prefers whole milk.

He doesn't remove any fat from his milk, so Happy Cow milk likely has even more fat than whole milk in the grocery store, which is 3.25 percent fat. Trantham's milk ranges between 3.6 percent fat in the summer and 4.2 percent in the winter.

But whole milk is not exactly known for being a health food.

"The most recent dietary guidelines for Americans recommends the low fat or the fat-free milk for everyone over the age of 2," Dietsch said.

Still, Trantham said his milk has its fans.

"My whole milk will burn body fat, it will generate energy and build muscle tone," he said. "We have heart doctors who come here and send their patients here."

Some customers come from neighboring states, including Georgia, for the health benefits of his milk, he said. Trantham even said his milk can cure cancer, citing two Happy Cow customers who he said cured breast cancer by drinking Happy Cow cream, which would naturally have more CLAs, for six months.

### Three glasses a day

Whether it can cure cancer or not, milk is certainly good for more than just bone health. It contains calcium, protein and eight vitamins. And it's usually fortified with vitamin D.

Dietsch said getting vitamin D has become a problem for some Americans, and the bone softening disease rickets is becoming more prevalent in children due to the lack of this vitamin. Vitamin D is synthesized in the body from sunlight, but three 8-ounce glasses of milk will provide 75 percent of the recommended daily allowance.

"It may even help reduce the risk of osteoporosis, hypertension, obesity, colon cancer, metabolic syndrome and just many other conditions that can lead to heart disease and type II diabetes," Dietsch said. "So it's not just for bone health. ... All of the other components are good for overall health."

### How it's made

Years ago, getting milk involved milking the family cow. That milk went straight into your glass. It's usually more complicated than that today.

"When the milk comes out of the cow it goes into a stainless steel tank and it's cooled to 38 degrees (F)," Truelove said. "And then a truck comes by and picks the milk up and takes it to a processing plant, and at the processing plant they do the pasteurization and homogenization."

At Happy Cow Creamery, milk is pasteurized but not homogenized. Trantham, who was a conventional dairy farmer for many years, doesn't speak highly of traditional processing.

Homogenization, which is voluntarily done, distributes the fat throughout the milk so cream doesn't rise. Dietsch said she didn't know of any research on negative health effects of homogenization.

Trantham said milk shoots through a screen at more than 2,000 pounds of pressure destroying the fat cell. He said the fat cell is no longer recognized by the body, doesn't function correctly and could cause cholesterol problems.

Pasteurization is required by most states, including Georgia, in order to kill any harmful bacteria. For the process, the milk is heated to 63 degrees Celsius for 30 minutes, according to Dietsch. For ultrapasteurization, the milk is heated to 138 degrees for two seconds. This also extends the shelf life.

Trantham said his dairy uses a low-temperature pasteurization, which kills 2 percent to 3 percent of healthy enzymes along with harmful bacteria.

Most organic milk also follows conventional processing. For this reason, Trantham doesn't bother classifying his milk as organic.

"We don't even mess with organic. We're better than organic," he said. "Organic's been ultrapasteurized, homogenized and artificial vitamin D (added). I don't care what they feed the cows, they've ruined the milk. So we're above that."

### Farmer Tom's story

The secret to the added nutritional value in Happy Cow Creamery milk?

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Cows that eat fresh pasture growth 12 months out of the year.

It's a farming method Trantham discovered by accident.

He bought the farm in 1978.

"It was totally conventional dairy; it was production at any cost, get big or get out, all of those things," he said. "And production was the only thing the farmer focused on, and it's unfortunately still that way in most cases."

In 1987, after a drought and hay lift, Trantham went to borrow money to buy his seed, chemicals and fertilizers. The loan was denied. Farm prices had dropped and suddenly he had no equity.

"I was totally disgusted and angry and sad and knowing that the farm was gone, my kids had to leave and it was all over," Trantham said.

Then something amazing happened. The way Trantham tells it, it was a divine intervention.

"My cows got together and had a cow meeting, and they said 'what's wrong with farmer Tom? He's grouchier than an old goat. And what's wrong with that fellow, hadn't seen him smile in months?' And they hadn't."

The cows busted down a gate and grazed on fresh April pasture. Trantham, disgusted at first, almost gave up then. But when he milked the cows that night, they were up 200 pounds of milk. Later, testing showed the milk has more nutritional value, too.

Trantham discovered that the cows ate only the top half of the fresh April growth, so he began planting crops for the cows to eat.

"I planted some more things that would grow up in June. And when the cows ate that first growth they gave all this special, special milk with special levels of CLAs and Omega-3s and all those things," Trantham said.

Through research and grants, Trantham has developed the 12 Aprils Dairy program. His cows graze April quality pasture 12 months of the year.

"The cows, the milk, the quality, everything, the dirt, the soil the worms, everything, has changed. We haven't used chemicals or chemical fertilizers on this farm now in 21 years."

Trantham said he's not out to get conventional dairy farmers. But after milking 130 cows conventionally, he said the dairy now milks about 80 cows, and he's making a living that's better than ever.

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