

MMPA Milk Supplies Country Fresh Products

The next time you pick up a gallon of Country Fresh or Jilbert's milk, you've likely purchased a product originated on an MMPA farm.

"MMPA is a majority supplier to the Country Fresh plants in Flint and Grand Rapids, and to the Jilbert Dairy plant in Marquette," says Carl Rasch, MMPA's Director of Milk Sales. "Those sales represent roughly half of MMPA's fluid milk sales."

When it arrives, MMPA members' milk is pasteurized, processed and packaged into a variety of Country Fresh and private label products, from fluid milk and cottage cheese to sour cream and dips.

Quality on the farm and in the plant

Consumers drinking milk processed in a Michigan Coun-

try Fresh plant won't likely notice a difference in taste from one plant to the other. That's due to the strict quality control measures required by Country Fresh's parent company, Dean Foods.

"Quality milk starts on the farm," says Lloyd Ward, Quality Control Manager at the Grand Rapids Country Fresh plant. "We can't make it any better than when it rolls in the door."

Every milk tanker that rolls into the plants undergoes extensive regulatory and quality tests before being put into production. MMPA works closely with Country Fresh managers to ensure those standards are met.

"Maintaining a quality milk supply is something the Country Fresh plants we supply place a lot of emphasis on," says Carl. "Each quarter we meet with their quality assurance people to see how well we are doing and review quality issues. They look at us as part of their team to achieve a quality product."

Inside the plant, clean equipment means a longer shelf life for dairy products.

Dean Foods plants not only follow all regulatory requirements for cleaning processing equipment, but have created a more rigorous set of quality measures to follow.



“All equipment is cleaned and verified every day,” Lloyd says. “All operators are also trained to clean the equipment. They follow the same procedures and checklists for cleaning every day. The lab follows behind them to swab the equipment and test for residue and bacteria. The equipment must be clean before going into production.”

Swabbing the equipment, following checklists and third-party outside audits are not required by regulatory agencies, explains Lloyd. The plants undergo these measures to ensure they are producing a quality, good-tasting product.

Year after year, milk samples submitted from the Country Fresh plants in Grand Rapids and Flint have earned high marks for taste and quality in national competitions, helping to measure the success of the strict quality controls.

Country Fresh rolls out innovative new products made with MMPA milk

While fluid milk, cottage cheese, sour cream and dips represent the core business of the Michigan plants, Dean Foods is continually developing innovative new products.

The success of nutraceuticals in other parts of the dairy case was an indication that consumers are ready for more such products, according to Kevin Begin, General Manager of three of the Dean Foods plants MMPA supplies. To keep up with

the market trend, the Flint and Grand Rapids plants recently added three new lines of health-related dairy items—probiotic milk, probiotic cottage cheese and lactose-free milk.

Growing consumer demand for lactose-free milk led to the introduction of Country Fresh’s new ‘Easy’ brand, with 2 percent and fat-free milks currently hitting grocers’ shelves.

“Our new probiotic products were launched in February in select markets,” Kevin says. “We are currently rolling them out in the Flint and Grand Rapids areas.”

Probiotics promote the healthy bacteria in food, similar to that found in yogurt, milk and some cheeses. The new probiotic cottage cheese provides *Lactobacillus acidophilus*, *Bifidobacterium* and *Lactobacillus casei*—beneficial microbes that inhibit the growth of harmful bacteria, promote improved digestion, boost immunity and can therefore increase resistance to infection.

The probiotic milk, available in 2 percent and fat-free, taste no different than conventional milk. A probiotic cottage cheese is also available, with the same flavor and texture consumers enjoy from conventional Country Fresh cottage cheese.

“Our research revealed that probiotics are one of the major new trends emerging in the food industry. We are excited about a great-tasting cottage cheese that also delivers specific health benefits,” says Dave Haley, Regional Director of Marketing for the Dean Dairy

Group. “Our product development team developed a product that is on-target for today’s consumer, who has an ever-increasing preference for healthy food products—especially those that taste great.”

With 29,000 employees in more than 120 plants in the United States and Spain, Dean Foods is one of America’s leading food and beverage companies. They are the largest distributor of milk and other dairy products under the Dean’s, Country Fresh, and Land O’ Lakes brands.

