



## Dairy Products – They’re Everywhere!

How many times have I gone to the refrigerator, opened the door and gazed at items that I had not seen the day before? I think I open that door at least 10 times a day—that’s almost 4,000 times per year. Yet, an obvious progression has eluded my attention over the years. What dawned on me recently was the immense variety of dairy products the dairy industry has developed over the years. The items that are derived from that wholesome commodity after it leaves our farms have increased in number bit by bit, and now the choices are impressive.

A quick glance in my refrigerator revealed the 2 percent milk I drink, the skim milk Liz drinks, cottage cheese (Liz), yogurt (Ken), “portable” yogurt (for the grandkids), cheddar, Swiss and mozzarella cheese (we all enjoy those) in various forms—from bricks to shreds to grandkid-friendly strings. This eye opener piqued my interest in further label-reading which led me to our kitchen cupboards. There, I discovered many more dairy ingredients in foods and drinks, several that I don’t usually associate with the dairy industry. From energy bars for adults to baked corn snacks for toddlers, dairy ingredients appear in many of the products we consume every day.

Consumer tastes have changed over the years. The dairy industry has kept up, and in many instances led the way to meet those changing needs. We have touted the benefits of dairy consumption for better health. As a result of more research, much of it financed by your dairy checkoff dollars, information campaigns that accurately portray the benefits of dietary dairy are now paying off. More people today are

interested in healthy living and are open to changing their dairy consumption habits to make improvements.

We hear the word “probiotics” often today. These live cultures provide health benefits beyond basic nutrition when consumed in sufficient quantities. Yogurt is considered to be one of the first probiotic food sources, because probiotics occur naturally in yogurt. In this country, most of the probiotics consumed come from yogurt and yogurt drinks, but new products, like the probiotic milk and cottage cheese featured in this *Messenger*, may change how some of us consume our probiotics. Sales of dairy foods with probiotics are increasing about 20 percent per year as consumers learn about its health benefits, including improved digestive health.

You would think that the current obesity epidemic would dramatically reduce dairy sales, because historically dairy has been perceived by many as a high fat, high calorie food. Our industry, through dairy checkoff dollars, has funded research that disproves this conventional wisdom. We have developed products with reduced fat and calories while maintaining the health benefits. Research has shown that consumption of reduced-fat dairy products, along with exercise, helps reduce weight. Once the extra weight is gone, dairy helps maintain healthy weight. Read the diet of a popular, tried-and-true, national weight-loss program, and you’ll find dairy is there.

Last year 1,222 new dairy products were introduced in the U.S. to meet the changing nutritional and taste desires of our consumers.

These products included some that target the taste buds of our ethnically diverse population including Mediterranean, Hispanic and Asian consumers. Different cultures have different ways of using a basic food, like cheese. When we develop or introduce products to meet new opportunities, we also increase the likelihood of increasing demand among current consumers who often welcome a new experience with an old stand-by like cheese.

Research into new uses for dairy products continues both here and around the world. For example, while attending the U.S. Dairy Export Council board meeting in April, I learned of a project in Japan that is exploring the substitution of 40 percent of the fish in a processed fish product with Whey Protein Concentrate - 80 (WPC-80). Fish has increased 50 percent in price in the last year. If this substitution works as well as researchers think it will, it will help control price while providing the same nutritional value. The success of this venture could increase the use of WPC-80 by 13,000 metric tons per year.

That day I opened the refrigerator door; two lights went on, the one in the fridge and the one in my head. For years we’ve claimed that milk was nature’s most nearly perfect food. We were criticized by some who didn’t agree, but science has proven our claims correct. As we celebrate the dairy industry in the month of June, take pride in the fact that our dairy checkoff investment has been successful beyond our wildest dreams. Our investment is good not only for the health of our industry, but also for the health of consumers.

Ken