

DailyFreeman.com

04/01/2007

Local milk finds market

By Patricia Doxsey

Milk from farms in Columbia and Dutchess counties has made its way to Manhattan being sold under the Hudson Valley Fresh label.

The not-for-profit organization formed in 2002 supports and encourages local agriculture and has been supplying milk to four businesses in New York City since September, effectively opening a new market for dairy farmers struggling to keep family farms in operation.

Today, the consortium of local dairy farmers ships 540 half-gallons of milk each week to grocery stores and restaurants on the Upper East Side, and negotiations are underway to get Hudson Valley Fresh milk on the shelves of a 40-store family-owned grocery store chain in the city.

"It gives us a market and New York City is a tremendous market," says Sam Simon president of Hudson Valley Fresh.

Hudson Valley Fresh, the brainchild of Simon, owner of Plankenhorn Farm in Pleasant Valley, and former state Assemblyman Patrick Manning, was formed to promote locally grown products to help agriculture in the Hudson Valley remain viable.

Most family farms operate on the margin, says Simon, and dairy farmers operating under byzantine federal pricing regulations tied to Chicago cheese markets struggle constantly to survive.

"The dairy farmer cannot live on 14 cents or 15 cents a pound," says Simon, indicating the current federally set price for milk.

Local farmers were able to find a niche in the market by branding their milk as from a Hudson Valley farm. Having milk of a superior quality to generic milks found commonly on supermarket shelves helped secure that niche, says Simon.

"All milk is not created equal," he explained. "There are several farms in the Hudson Valley that produce premium quality milk," which, he says, is all processed at Ronnybrook Farms in Pine Plains and marketed under the Hudson Valley Fresh label.

Seven dairy farms from Dutchess and Columbia counties provide milk for the Hudson Valley Fresh label, collectively they produce about 12 million pounds of milk per year. Only a small percentage of that milk is marketed as Hudson Valley Fresh. The rest goes to the Agrimark dairy co-op, which pays farmers the federal rate for the milk.

Hudson Valley Fresh milk contains a somatic cell count, a measure of the white blood count in milk and an indicator of infection within the herd, of less than 200,000 per milliliter, a number that is more than 50 percent less than the levels found in generic milk and nearly 80 percent less than the allowable levels.

The allowable bacteria count, Simon says, is about 50,000 per milliliter. Hudson Valley Fresh milk has bacteria counts of less than 5,000 per milliliter.

Farmers providing milk for the Hudson Valley Fresh label use no recombinant bovine somatotrapin, a growth hormone commonly called rbST, to stimulate the cows to produce milk longer. In addition, the fat count in Hudson Valley Fresh milk is significantly higher than that in generic milks.

"That's how we distinguish ourselves," says Simon.

Hudson Valley Fresh farmers are guaranteed 18 cents a pound for their milk, which sells for about \$1 a gallon more than generic milks, Simon says.

"It meant \$25,000 in our first year's operation that was shared by the seven farms," says Simon. "This year's already expected to have 40-50 percent growth, and that's real hard dollars that they can work with."

Simon says that those who question why they should spend more for milk from the Hudson Valley should consider this: the seven dairy farms collectively represent more than 4,500 acres of farmland in Dutchess County.

Advertisement




DailyFreeman
YAHOO! hotjobs

Post an ad in the Daily Freeman
and your job listing can also
appear on Yahoo! HotJobs

[CLICK HERE](#)

Without the ability to farm, he says, those lands could be sold for development.

"Everybody wants open space, but if you don't keep the stewards of the land on t he land," says Simon. "There isn't going to be any open space."

<p>PRICE or SERVICE?</p> <p><small>P067023 1/06</small></p>	<p>GET BOTH.</p>	<p>Contact your local State Farm agent. Click here for more information</p>	
--	-----------------------------	--	---

©Daily Freeman 2007