

Serious Eats: New York

Meet & Eat: Sam Simon, Hudson Valley Fresh

Posted by Laren Spierer, March 27, 2009

"Our cows are happy cows—they get to eat a lot of hay which is what makes the milk froth so well."

When we pick up a quart of milk in the supermarket, so many of us don't think twice about where that milk came from, or even how it tastes compared to other types of milk on the shelf. **Sam Simon** wants to change that. President of the **Hudson Valley Fresh** dairy cooperative, Simon holds milk tasting events throughout the New York City area so that consumers can notice the difference in taste and learn about the difference in production methods between mass-produced supermarket milk and theirs.

So what's the secret ingredients that makes Hudson Valley Fresh milk so popular among baristas? Read on and find out!



Name: Dr. Sam Simon

Location: Hudson River Valley

Occupation: President, Hudson Valley Fresh

Website: hudsonvalleyfresh.com

What is Hudson Valley Fresh, exactly? Hudson Valley Fresh is a not-for-profit dairy cooperative dedicated to preserving the agricultural heritage of the Hudson River Valley.

Tell us a little about your path from orthopedic surgery to the farm. Well first of all, I love cows, I've been around them my whole life. I grew up on a 200-acre dairy family farm in Middletown, New York, and I've really never stopped farming. After retiring from a successful 22-year practice as an orthopedic surgeon in Poughkeepsie, I went right back to it and purchased the 150-acre Plankenhorn family dairy farm in Pleasant Valley.

I saw first-hand the challenges that family farmers face every day, and in 2004, I and former assemblyman Patrick Manning founded Hudson Valley Fresh.

My mission is to save family farms by making sure the farmers earn a living wage, thereby keeping money in the local economy and saving agricultural open space, all while selling the freshest, highest quality milk to the local community. I stay in this business because someone needs to be an advocate for these family dairy farmers. Many coops treat milk as just a commodity but we take a lot of pride in our product and deserve recognition for that. All milk is not created equally.

How is Hudson Valley Fresh milk different from what we might find in an ordinary supermarket? And why is that important? Our milk is super high quality milk. You can't get any fresher than what we deliver in the city—36 hours from cow to customer. We also do not ultra pasteurize our milk. It is flash pasteurized, at 164 degrees for twenty seconds. So the milk retains its original flavor while having a long shelf life. We never ever use artificial hormones to stimulate milk production.

Our cows are happy cows—they get to eat a lot of hay which is what makes the milk froth so well. Baristas love our product.

Why should Serious Eaters choose your milk and where can we find it in New York City? If your readers like milk, then they will appreciate our brand. We think our milk tastes the way it's supposed to taste. Most people don't realize that the flavor in most supermarket milks has been lost. You can find our milk in Whole Foods, Eli's on the Upper East Side, Foragers's in Dumbo, Union Market and Get Fresh Table and Market in Park Slope, and soon at Marlow & Daughters and Urban Rustic Market in Williamsburg and Choice Greene in Clinton Hill.

How do you select the farmers with whom you work? All of our farmers live within a 20-mile range. We are neighbors, we are friends. But ultimately, the selection of farmers we work with comes down to the quality of their milk. We are really picky about

that. We have extremely low somatic cell counts, we have extremely low bacteria counts, way, way below the federal government standard. We do monthly quality testing by DHIA. All participating farmers must have excellent milk standards for one year before joining HVF.

How does working in a cooperative benefit the farmers economically? Dairy farmers are in the midst of a crisis. We are facing a dramatic collapse of milk prices that haven't been seen in 50 years. Our farmers need to be supported and get a guaranteed income or you can kiss the dairy farmer bye-bye. They can't afford to stick around if they get paid less for their product than what it costs them to make which is what is happening with the big industrial milk brands and their farmers. Many are going out of business.

We pay the farmer a living wage for his milk—right now commodity milk is selling for \$11.80 per hundred weight—and we guarantee our farmers \$20 per hundred weight. By keeping these farmers in business we are saving over 5,000 acres of farmland in Hudson Valley. Now that's sustainable agriculture!

How many cows are part of your network? Hudson Valley Fresh is made up of 7 farms and currently we have over 800 milking cows that produce over 1.5 million pounds of milk per month. A gallon equals 8.6 pounds so that's a lot of milk!

Do you sell other products besides milk? We are now processing our milk at the Boice Brothers Dairy in Kingston, New York, which is a large, modern facility and it allows us to grow by increasing our production line. We have always sold whole, skim, fat free and chocolate milk along with half and half, heavy cream and now our own sour cream will be making its debut very soon. We are also looking into making our own ice cream and crème fraiche. Perhaps buttermilk.

Do you spend much time in the city? If so, what are some of your favorite spots? If not, what are your favorite dishes? I never get into the city much, my primary responsibility is to stay on the farm and take care of the cows. I eat simply. Nothing spicy. My all time favorite dish is scrambled eggs and toast. And on occasion, meatloaf.

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