Dairy myths vs. Dairy truths

Farming & cow care

Myth
Milk contains antibiotics.

Truth
There will never be any antibiotics in your milk. Milk is tested multiple times before it reaches the store, and if it tests positive for even the slightest amount of antibiotics, it is safely discarded and never reaches the store.

Both organic and conventional dairy farmers treat ill cows with the same antibiotics under the close supervision of a veterinarian.

• On a conventional farm, the cow is taken from the milking herd for treatment, and not returned to the herd until her milk tests free of antibiotics.
• On an organic farm, that cow permanently leaves the herd and is usually moved to a conventional dairy farm.

Myth
There are harmful hormones in milk.

Truth
Hormones are naturally present in all foods, whether plant or animal, and are broken down during digestion. Both conventional and organic milk naturally contain tiny amounts of hormones – an extremely low amount relative to the amount our bodies naturally produce.

Bovine somatotropin (bST) is a protein hormone that cows naturally produce to grow as calves and make milk as adults. Scientists have synthesized a copy of bST called recombinant bovine somatotropin (rbST), which some dairy farmers choose to give to cows to boost milk production. rbST is never added directly to milk.

• Health authorities such as the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the National Institutes of Health (NIH) have determined that milk from cows treated with rbST is both nutritious and safe.
• Research indicates the hormone levels in milk are the same whether or not cows are given rbST.[1]

Myth

Milk causes early puberty.

Truth

Some studies suggest puberty has been skewing younger over several decades,[2] but children's milk consumption has declined over the same period.[3] The potential causes and long-term effects of early puberty remain unclear, but recent studies suggest it may be linked with higher body weight.[4]

Myth

Dairy cows are mistreated.

Truth

Dairy farmers' commitment to providing high-quality milk begins with taking good care of their cows.

• Dairy cows have balanced, nutritious diets designed by professional nutritionists.
• Dairy cows have access to clean water all day.
• Dairy cows receive preventive veterinary care and prompt treatment when they're ill.
• Many dairy cows live in freestall barns that protect them from the weather while allowing them to walk around, eat, drink and sleep whenever they choose.

Myth

Pasteurization destroys the nutrients in milk.

Truth

Pasteurized milk offers the same health benefits as raw milk, without the risks.

• A small amount of vitamin C is lost during pasteurization; however, milk is not a good source of vitamin C to begin with.
• Bacteria that can cause harm is destroyed during pasteurization, but dairy products like yogurt or kefir can provide good bacteria; fermented from pasteurized milk, they provide live and active cultures without the risk of foodborne illness.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recommend that no one consume raw milk.

References:
1. Vicini J. et al. Survey of retail milk composition as affected by label claims regarding farm-management practice. Journal of the American Dietetic Association. 2008;108:1198-1203 **2.** Walvoord, E.C. The timing of puberty: Is it changing? Does it matter? J. Adol. Health 47: 433-439, 2010. **3.** Sebastian, R.S., J.D. Goldman, C. Wilkinson Enns, et al. Fluid Milk Consumption in the United States: What We Eat In America, NHANES 2005-2006. Food Surveys Research Group Dietary Data Brief No. 3. September 2010. Available from: http://ars.usda.gov/SP2UserFiles/Place/12355000/pdf/DBrief/3_milk_consumption_0506.pdf. Accessed October 19, 2017. **4.** Kaplowitz, P.B. Link between body fat and the timing of puberty. Pediatrics 121: 208s-217s, 2008.