

Ask a Farmer



Q: Where does milk go after it leaves the farm?

A: Milk is shipped daily from my Sycamore farm to a dairy company in Rockford where it is bottled and sold under the Prairie Farms label.

Our milk is picked up every day from the farm, about 8 o'clock in the morning. The milk truck hauler agitates the milk and takes a sample from our farm. This farm sample is used to measure the fat, protein and quality of the milk.

The milk truck then arrives at the dairy plant but before the hauler unloads the milk another sample is taken and tested to make sure all of the milk in the truck is of the highest quality and there are no antibiotics or quality issues. If anything is ever found in the milk it would be discarded and the individual farm samples will identify which farm is responsible. All milk must have no antibiotics in it and dairy farmers can lose their permit to sell milk if they violate these standards.

My milk is sold to the Midwest Dairymen's Company in Rockford. The Midwest Dairymen's Company is a cooperative which means that I and other producers are members and owners of the company. The company owns Shullsburg Cheese in Shullsburg, Wisconsin, and has a joint venture with Prairie Farms, a bottling plant in Rockford, called Muller-Pinehurst Dairy.

My cows' milk is hauled to Muller-Pinehurst to be homogenized and pasteurized and then bottled under the label of Prairie Farms. It is usually bottled the same day and then is delivered the following day to stores and schools.

Muller's delivers milk to most of the schools in the area and several grocery stores, such as Hy-Vee. Sometimes when schools are not in session, like in the summers or Christmas break, my milk may go to another location or our co-op could sell it to another dairy plant primarily in northern Illinois.

In northern Illinois there are bottling plants for fluid milk, ice cream plants, bottling plants for Kiefer which is a drinkable yogurt, cottage cheese plants, and several cheese plants. These plants get their milk from Illinois and Wisconsin dairy farms.

Take a close look at the jug or carton of your (Prairie Farms) milk to see if the milk may be from my farm. Underneath the expiration date is a plant code; the first number indicates the state. The state of Illinois number is 17. If the first number isn't 17, the milk was produced in a

Bill Deusch is a fifth generation dairy and grain farmer from Sycamore. He milks cows and grows corn, soybeans, wheat and alfalfa, with his brother, Pat. Bill and his wife, Chris, reside on the family farm. They have four adult children: Sarah, Mary, Rachel and Paul.

different state. The Muller-Pinehurst plant number is 284. So 17-284 is milk from Muller-Pinehurst in Rockford and could possibly be milk from my farm. Additionally, the plant code may be on generic store brand labels, like Hy-Vee, which also gets deliveries from Muller's.

Being a co-op member, I share collectively with other dairy farmers who are owners of the co-op. So if the co-op makes a profit, we all share in the profits and receive patronage refunds at the end of the year.

As a dairy farmer I take care of my cows, continually monitoring their health and nutrition, so they can produce good quality milk for my family and yours. ■

Got a question for a farmer?

Submit your farm and food questions to connections@dekalffarmbureau.org. We will share questions with our local farmers and publish their answers as space allows in upcoming issues of *Connections*.