

Ask a Farmer



Bill Deutsch 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.

Q: How do you milk your cows and what safety measures do you follow?

A: We milk our cows in a milking parlor twice a day. In order to maintain high quality milk, we make sure our cows are clean before milking them, sanitize all of our equipment, and maintain a constant temperature in the milk tank.

We milk our cows twice a day, morning and evening. Some farms milk three times a day with an eight hour shift. My day starts at 3:30 in the morning and we usually start milking by 4 a.m. Then in the afternoon, our cows are milked around 3 p.m.

Today, farmers have a variety of dairy farm milking facilities. Some of these include: a stanchion barn, a tie-stall barn, a rotary milking parlor, herringbone parlors, parallel parlors and even milking parlors with robots. We milk our cows in a double-eight parallel parlor. This means we can milk up to 16 cows at a time in our parlor. It takes about four hours to milk our 150 cows.

Parlors are the most common milking facility used by dairymen today. In a parlor, cows are elevated at platform height while dairymen are below, sometimes in a concrete pit like ours. This allows dairymen to attach milking units without bending over. It's similar to changing oil in a car whereby you go into a pit. In a milking parlor, cows are about waist height for ease of attaching milking units.

Milk quality is extremely important on dairy farms. So cleanliness is paramount and we make sure cows are cleaned properly before units are attached. To clean the teats on a cow there are several different procedures, from washing with soap and drying with paper towels or individual cloth towels, to using foamers and automated machines. We recently installed an automatic handheld machine that washes the cows' teats and dries them. Proper washing of the cow's udder also stimulates her to let her milk down and feels good to the cow being milked.

The milking units are attached and the milk flows directly from the cow's udder into the units and then through stainless steel pipelines into the milk tank. On our farm, as well as many dairy farms, we allow the milk to pass-through a plate cooler. A plate cooler is a stainless steel radiator this uses well water to cool the milk efficiently down to about 65°. The water can then be recycled and used for cow drinking water and also to clean the parlor area. The equipment and the pipes are cleaned after milking is done. The milk tank used for storing milk is cleaned as well after the milk is removed.

Automatic washers clean the inside of all surfaces milk comes in contact with. We also have timers to sanitize equipment prior to milking time. This ensures high milk quality from the cow to the milk tank.

Maintaining high quality milk is necessary. We currently have a temperature clock on our milk tank to ensure the temperature of the milk is monitored continuously and stays constant.

Milk quality and safety are extremely important on dairy farms. Before our milk leaves the farm, a milk sample is taken and the temperature is read and recorded by a licensed milk hauler. All milk has to meet high quality standards for a dairy plant to accept it. It's my job as a dairy farmer to produce high-quality milk so you can enjoy it! ■