



Trish Corby

Dairy



By Trish Corby, President & CEO of the Good Cow Company

While exhibiting at the Seattle Coffee Fest last fall, Miles Small (editor of CoffeeTalk) approached our booth. He and I started a very lively and extended conversation about this very topic. What we did both agree upon was that the only consistent discussion amongst the broader industry was the current price of a gallon of milk. Granted, this is a very important factor, but only one amongst many. Miles asked if I might write a column to discuss those aspects of the dairy industry that impact a retail operator.

It's perplexing to me to think how closely tied the retail coffee industry is with the dairy industry, yet how very little communication exists between the two groups.

Just think about it for a bit – depending upon your product mix, milk and cream can be an ingredient in 85% of the beverages you serve – and a major component in most cases. Now compare your knowledge level of coffee (it's sourcing, how it's priced, how it is roasted, how to taste it properly, etc.) against your knowledge of milk. How did you fare?

My first column topic is the general factors that determine the quality of the milk you receive, and what you as an operator can look for and control. Your goal is to deliver a quality, consistent finished drink to your customer – that takes understanding and controlling your raw materials.

For years, one of my favorite lines has been: "All milk is not created equal". Yes, it does have a *minimum* standard for components and a maximum standard for bacteria levels that is regulated by either the state or federal government, but that certainly does not make it equal. Coffee retailers spend years determining the sourcing, roasting, and quality of their beans, yet generally spend the minimum possible time understanding their milk source.

There are multiple factors that affect the quality of milk – some obviously determined by the cow herself, (such as her breed, her health, etc.) but there are many other factors as well: how she is housed, how the milk it is handled, processed, packaged, transported and stored. Here is the "basic" list:

Feed: the blend of feed that a cow eats impacts the flavor profile of the milk, as well as the amount of milk she produces, and its component levels. There might be many reasons for the changing of feed -available supply, seasonality, and price of feed components.

Quality of Care: how the cow is treated, and her surrounding environment impacts the overall quality of the milk she produces. If her environment is not well maintained, there is a higher chance that her milk will have higher levels of bacteria, which directly impacts the quality and taste of the milk.

Age and handling of raw milk before processing: the older the age of the raw milk and the higher the temperature while it is transported, the greater the opportunity for the milk to grow bacteria. There are regulations that limit both the age and the temperature milk is stored and transported, but again, these are *maximum* levels.

Processing/Pasteurization- how it is pasteurized once it arrives at the processing plant also will impact the final flavor and quality. This is easily detectable through tasting the end product.

Packaging type / light: light can also degrade the flavor of milk. Most gallon packaging will allow the passage of light, though there are some processors that use colored plastics.

Oxygen: oxidation of milk occurs when it is exposed to air. Once that container is opened, the flavor of the milk will begin to degrade.

Distribution conditions: Check the temperature of your delivery. Check the truck that delivers your product. Milk can pick up off flavors if shipped or stored with aromatic products.

Storage: Do not abuse the product once you receive it. Keep it below 40 F if possible, 37-38 even better. That means – check your coolers, do not leave them open, do not leave your milk sitting out. Do not store milk in your refrigerator next to food products with high aroma levels.

Age: check your code date, and follow it. Your processor puts that date on the carton to ensure a quality product through its use.

The most critical thing to remember – TASTE! Taste your milk cold, as milk, taste it as steamed milk, and finally taste your finished beverage. Do not assume your milk will always remain the same. Conduct routine "quality checks". Go to your nearest grocery and pick up other brands to compare what you are buying against those. Taste the product you are using that day at the bar against the product you just received.

When conducting a tasting, taste your nonfat, then whole, and then creams. Taste for any off flavors. Milk should always taste clean, with a very slight cooked note. If it tastes cooked or scorched as cold milk, imagine what it will taste like when you steam it.

In future columns, some of the following topics have been proposed: how the price of milk is determined, components in milk- what are they, why are they important to you, the definition of various certifications: organic, free farmed, no hormone added, etc.

If there are other dairy topics that you would like to see addressed, or if you have a specific question, please send those to: coffeetalk@goodcow.com and I will attempt to address those also. *CT*



Trish Corby is the President & CEO of the Good Cow Company- a dairy products and processing company that focuses on delivering innovative dairy solutions for food service and institutional customers. Her professional experience has been in operations and general management with various large multinational food manufacturers and coffee retailers.