



INSPIRES

INFORMS

INSTRUCTS

K-12 FOODSERVICE

MILKING IT

for All It's Worth

BY DYLAN ROCHE

Fascinating facts
to celebrate National
Dairy Month in June.

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ARE YOU FINISHING UP THE LAST FEW WEEKS OF THE ACADEMIC YEAR?

Or perhaps you've already begun to offer summer meals in neighborhoods throughout your community. Wherever you are in your program's calendar, it's important to continue to do your part to keep student customers engaged, entertained and even a bit educated. One way to do this as you moooo-ve into summer is to celebrate a food group that plays an essential role in healthy school meals. June is your opportunity to put **dairy** in the spotlight!

National Dairy Month has been an ongoing tradition since 1937. Originally called National Milk Month, the observance initially focused on promoting milk consumption at a time when dairy cows were producing a surplus. But over the years, it transitioned to a monthlong celebration of the many health benefits that milk and dairy products provide. That's especially important in schools, where dairy foods have been a consistent source of nutrients for generations of growing children.

To help you engage your school community and raise awareness about the value of milk and dairy, we've compiled a list of 30 captivating facts and fun ideas—one for each day of National Dairy Month! We've divided these into three categories, but feel free to reorder, mix and match or substitute as needed to suit your own purposes for sharing them with students and families on social media, in serving line signage and dining area displays, as components in nutrition education materials or as elements of promotional activities.



Most dairy foods—including milk but also yogurt and cheese—are high in nutrients necessary for good health.

Think about it: Milk is nature's way of giving a baby calf everything it needs to grow into a strong, healthy cow. If you're like most people, the first nutrient that probably comes to mind is calcium, which is necessary for building and maintaining strong bones. But

dairy is also a great source of vitamins A and D, vitamin B12, potassium, zinc, magnesium, selenium and phosphorus.



If you're drinking low-fat or fat-free milk, most of the calories in the beverage derive from high-quality protein, which your body uses to build and repair tissue, including muscle.

DAIRY DISTINCTIONS

ALL ABOUT THE DIFFERENT FOODS MADE FROM DAIRY



A small amount of the calories in milk come from carbohydrates in the form of lactose, a natural sugar. For people who are lactose intolerant, their

body is unable to digest this sugar, so milk and other dairy products can cause gas, bloating, diarrhea and other discomfort. If you are lactose intolerant, you can still enjoy dairy products and reap their nutritional benefits as long as you manage your diet properly: eat smaller servings of dairy, opt for lactose-free products when available and talk to a health professional about over-the-counter lactase enzyme tablets that can help digestion.



There are dozens and dozens of individual cheese varieties (from asadero to Taleggio), but did you know they all fall into one of eight basic forms?

According to www.usdairy.com, five are hard, semi-hard, semi-soft, soft and fresh and soft-ripened cheese. Then, there's blue cheese, processed cheese and pasta filata cheese.



Yogurt and sour cream may taste very different, but they are made by similar methods—they both involve fermenting dairy by adding lactic acid and

bacteria. In the case of sour cream, this process is done to a combination of cream and milk. Yogurt is made by fermenting milk alone, no cream is involved. Because sour cream (along with cream, cream cheese and butter) has such a high fat content and such low calcium content, USDA doesn't include it as a dairy group food for its MyPlate dietary consumption recommendations. Still, sour cream tastes great and can be enjoyed in moderation. Use it as a



sandwich spread, as a dip or in salad dressings. If you want a more nutritious, lower-fat substitution for sour cream, consider plain (unflavored) Greek yogurt.



Wondering about the differences between trendy Greek, Icelandic and Australian yogurts on retail shelves? Good question! These

styles of yogurt tend to be much thicker than traditional yogurt. **Greek** yogurt has been strained so the liquid whey is removed. It has a naturally tart flavor to it and double the protein. **Icelandic** yogurt (called *skyr*) has been strained even further, resulting in a yogurt that's *even* thicker and has *even more* protein, though with less of a tart flavor. **Australian** yogurt has the same thick texture as these two other styles of yogurts, but not because of straining. Depending on the brand, Australian yogurt might be made from whole milk or has been cooked longer.



You might notice that milk is referred to as "pasteurized" on its packaging. Pasteurization is a means of killing



pathogens in the milk by heating the liquid to a specific temperature before packaging and distribution. This is a legal requirement—all milk on the market must be pasteurized to ensure it is safe to consume. Raw milk that has not undergone pasteurization may contain such bacteria as *E. coli*, salmonella and listeria.



Do you love the delectable stretch of molten cheese that results when you pull a slice of pizza from the rest of the pie or cut a grilled cheese sandwich in two? There's a science behind that perfect stretchiness—it's the result of the protein molecules in cheese when heated up. But this stretch can be affected by factors like acidity, fat content and water content, which explains why some cheeses stretch (mozzarella, for example) and other cheese don't (like Parmesan).



Your bone density (and in turn, your bone strength) is determined by the presence of calcium, which your bones absorb and store. That's why

consuming plenty of dairy is important for the formation of strong bones, especially in a child's growing body. Our bodies can't produce calcium on their own, so they need to get it from the foods we eat.



Don't confuse plant-based "milk" alternatives with dairy milk from a nutritive perspective. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration defines milk specifically as "lacteal secretions" from an animal, including not only cows but also goats and sheep. While plant-based drinks made from products like soy, rice or nuts might be appealing for taste and other reasons, they don't provide the same protein, calcium or other nutritive content you find in dairy milk. (The exception to this is fortified soy milk, which the USDA includes in MyPlate's dairy group for consumers because of its similar nutritive profile. However, it is not a generally accepted substitute for school meal programs.)

UDDERLY NUTRITIOUS

DAIRY KNOWLEDGE FOR K-12 SCHOOL NUTRITION PROFESSIONALS AND YOUR STUDENTS!



Mark your calendars:
World School Milk Day is September 28, 2022, and if you want to help your students create an oh-so-photogenic

milk mustache as a fun cafeteria activity, here's the trick to getting just the right look. Let 3 cups of ice cream soften in the fridge overnight, then combine with 1 cup milk in a large pitcher. Stir slowly to combine. Pour into a cup and take a sip, allowing the mixture to coat your upper lip. Now you've got the right look for the perfect photo op!



Milk has long been a required component in school meals because it provides essential nutrients that are crucial for young, growing bodies—especially for children who might not always be able to enjoy the benefits of a well-rounded diet. Some families may not have access to an

abundance of fresh, healthy foods. Similarly, it can be difficult to address long-established family or cultural eating patterns that lean on heavily processed foods with little nutritive value. Milk in schools can be a gateway to help children and parents reject or reduce consumption of sugar-heavy soda and juice beverages.



Got a favorite flavor for dairy foods like cheese, yogurt and milk? This can be the basis of a fun cafeteria activity. Offer sample sizes of one product with different varieties and flavors and ask students to identify the one they like best. (Consider how you might increase the winners on future school menus.) At the conclusion of the event, share and compare your school's findings with the nation's top picks. These are, according to www.drink-milk.com, cheddar for cheese and vanilla for ice cream.

Glanbial Nutritionals finds that strawberry is the top favorite yogurt flavor. And numerous studies confirm what's probably patently obvious in your cafeteria: Chocolate milk reigns supreme.



Did you know that chocolate milk is a great recovery drink after intense exercise? It's become a go-to beverage for many athletes. That's because it has the right combination of fluids, carbohydrates and protein the body needs when it has exerted itself.



How can you help kids better understand milk's role in delivering calcium? Begin with a little comparison. About 4.5 cups of broccoli has the same amount of calcium as 1 cup of milk. You could also eat nearly 6 slices of whole-grain bread. Or just drink the milk.



Although yogurt is a dairy product and a great source of many of the same nutrients found in milk, the two are not interchangeable within the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP). Instead, yogurt is considered a meat alternate. A half-cup (or 4 ozs.) of yogurt credits as 1-oz.-eq. meat alternate. (The minimum creditable amount is $\frac{1}{8}$ cup, 1 oz., for $\frac{1}{4}$ -oz.-eq. meat alternate.) Yogurt does not count as a replacement for fluid milk, even when it is included in a beverage such as a smoothie or sold as squeezable or drinkable yogurts.



The Special Milk Program, established in 1954, is a federal reimbursement program to provide milk to young children in childcare



settings without access to other federal meal service programs. At schools, the Special Milk Program is an option for children in half-day pre-K and kindergarten programs who do not have access to NSLP/SBP meals.



Flavored milk is a great way to encourage children to drink up. Flavored milk has the same essential nutrients as regular milk, and research shows the minimal amount of added sugar is worth the nutritive benefit. Plus, it's *always* a better choice than the added sugar in many beverages, such as soda.



When students don't have the option of flavored milk, they don't necessarily reach for the plain variety. Quite the opposite, actually—milk consumption by students goes down 35% when there's no flavored option, reports the American Dairy Association of the Northeast.



Some kids can be more sensitive to spicy foods than adults with tastebuds more accustomed to heat. Promote dairy as a soothing companion to quell the pain! A protein called casein that is found in dairy can fight the chemical capsaicin that gives chili peppers their fiery bite. Keep some milk on hand when offering spicy food samples.

TAKING STOCK

ALL ABOUT DAIRY AGRICULTURE



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The United States is home to more than 40,000 dairy farms, with farms located in each one of the 50 states—even Hawaii and Alaska! Most of them (95%, in fact) are owned and operated by families.

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Dairy cows are milked twice or even three times a day, producing somewhere between 7 and 8 gallons of milk. Processing is quick—milk typically arrives at grocery stores within 48 hours!

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The National Dairy FARM (Farmers Assuring Responsible Management) Program was created in 2009 to ensure all dairy producers that distribute milk to cooperatives and processors are taking proper care of their cows and raising them in safe, healthy environments. FARM also helps reduce the carbon footprint of the dairy.

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Robotics have brought dairy farming into the 21st century and helped move the industry toward being more efficient and sustainable. In 2021, Indiana-based Homestead Dairy was awarded the title Innovative Dairy Farmer of the Year by *Dairy Herd Management* magazine and the International Dairy Foods Association for its use of technology like automated calf feeders and a methane digester, which breaks down the notorious greenhouse gas before it can be released into the atmosphere.

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There's no single breed of "dairy cow." Six different breeds are used for dairy in the United States: Ayrshire, Brown Swiss, Guernsey, Holstein, Jersey and Milking Shorthorn.



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If you see spots—black and white ones—when you picture a cow peacefully grazing in a field, you’re imagining a Holstein. Like fingerprints, their spotted pattern is unique to each animal. Holsteins tend to be greater producers of milk compared with other breeds; this and their distinctive appearance make them a favorite for marketers.

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You might have heard cows have multiple stomachs, but that’s not exactly true. Cows have one stomach that’s separated into four compartments. These compartments help the cow digest grass that it has only partially broken down by the process of chewing. This is what’s known as a ruminant digestive system.

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Even though cows need that four-compartment stomach to break down partially chewed grass, they still do a fair amount of chewing. With their 32 teeth, cows do about 50 chews every minute.

They also produce about 125 pounds of saliva every day!

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Want to make dairy a part of farm-to-school educational activities in your school? If you don’t have easy access to visit an area farm for a field trip, the American Dairy Association offers virtual tours of dairy farms that are specifically developed for K-12 students. Learn more at www.americandairy.com/dairy-farms/virtual-farm-tours.

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We don’t recommend bringing a cow inside the cafeteria (obviously), but if you end up doing so (for some reason), don’t let the cow go upstairs! Although a cow can walk upstairs, its knees don’t bend the way needed to travel downstairs. You’ll be stuck carrying that 1,200-pound baby back to ground level—and good luck! **SN+**

Dylan Roche is an SN Contributing Editor based in Arnold, Md.

A close-up photograph of a young girl with long brown hair and glasses, wearing a pink shirt. She is smiling and holding a spoon with macaroni and cheese. In front of her is a white bowl filled with the same dish. To the right, a carton of Land O'Lakes milk is partially visible. The background is a soft, out-of-focus white.

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