

# Dairy Farms: Where Cows Come First



**INNOVATION**  
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## A Foundation of Respect

Remember when milk came to the doorstep by way of the milk man? Our lives are dramatically different these days, and so are America's dairy farms. What hasn't changed from generation to generation is the farmer's commitment to taking good care of the animals.

Today's dairy farms, whether they span a few acres or a few thousand, whether they're located five miles from the city or 500, often have a lot in common. Crops are grown and fertilized in ways that keep the land fertile and conserve water. Barns and other buildings are designed with the comfort of the cows in mind. And modern equipment, such as computerized record-keeping and tractors with GPS navigation, is used to boost productivity.

Most dairy farmers inherited the land from their parents, grandparents or great-grandparents and plan to pass it onto their children. Over the generations, dairy farm families have looked for ways to improve as stewards of dairy cows and the land. Today, many farms are enrolled in the National Dairy FARM Program: Farmers Assuring Responsible Management™ ([www.nationaldairyfarm.com](http://www.nationaldairyfarm.com)), a program designed to provide verifiable means of showing dairy products are produced with integrity by dairy farmers across the country. The number of cooperatives and processors in the program continues to grow, with their farms now producing more than 70 percent of America's milk.

Want more information? Visit [www.dairygood.org](http://www.dairygood.org) or better yet, take your family to a local dairy to see modern farming for yourself.





## What Do Cows Eat?

The quality of the feed for dairy cows is important because it affects the quality of the milk. Most dairy farmers work with professional animal nutritionists to develop a balanced and nutritious diet for their cows.

Feed ingredients vary by season and geography. Typically they are forage (hay or corn silage), grains (corn, wheat and barley), protein sources (soybeans and canola) and vitamin and mineral supplements. Medicated feed is never used on dairy farms to prevent disease among the cows being milked.

Cows on USDA certified-organic farms and grass-fed cows spend the grazing season (at least 120 days per year) on green pasture. They usually need supplemental feed to get enough protein. In the winter, cows on organic farms eat the same feed as cows on other farms, except that on an organic farm, all the ingredients are certified organic.

## Where Do Cows Live?

Many dairy farmers either raise their cows on pasture, in open-sided “freestall” barns or in open lots with shady areas depending on the climate and other geographic considerations. In freestall barns, cows eat, drink, sleep, and move around whenever and wherever they like. Stalls are filled with soft sand, dry compost or mattresses filled with rubber or water so they have a dry and comfortable bed. Fans, automatic misters, shelter, and ventilation systems keep cows content in cold or hot weather.

On some farms, the cows are housed in what is known as a “tie-stall” barn, which means the cows are tethered at certain points throughout the day. Farmers do this so that the cows can receive individual attention during milking, health checks and/or feeding throughout the day. Tie-stall barns are designed to provide a comfortable living and working environment for milking cows and their caretakers.





## How Are Calves Cared For?

A cow begins giving milk once she delivers her first calf at about two years of age. Dairy cows have a calf about once a year.

Taking care of calves is important on dairy farms because calves represent the future. When a cow is ready to give birth, the area is to be clean, dry, well-lit and well-ventilated maternity area to ensure comfortable, safe and hygienic conditions. Calves are usually moved to a “calf hutch” shortly after birth. This protects them from germs that can be passed on from the environment or other animals while their immune systems mature and allows for individual feeding and health monitoring.

Newborn calves are fed colostrum, the mother’s first milk, which is high in fat, protein and natural immune-boosting elements. Female calves grow up to join the milking herd, while male calves are raised for beef, veal or breeding purposes.

Dairy farmers work hard to ensure the safety and well-being of their animals, farm workers and their farms. To keep the cows safe in the herd and to protect the people who work with the animals, it’s best for the animals prevent the growth of horns. The “disbudding” of horn buds before they begin developing is a fairly simple procedure that is typically conducted in the first few weeks of a calf being born, following American Veterinary Medical Association and American Association of Bovine Practitioners recommendations.





## How Are the Animals Kept Healthy?

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Veterinarians routinely visit dairy farms to conduct check-ups, administer vaccinations and treat illness. Farmers and their workers observe the cows every day, so they quickly notice if an animal becomes ill. The veterinarian is called in for a consultation if needed.

If a cow has a bacterial infection, she is often treated with antibiotics. It is important to note that a cow being treated with antibiotics has her milk separated from the other cows to make sure her milk does not enter the food supply until after she is healthy again.

It may take several days for the medicine to completely clear the cow's system. To ensure there are no antibiotic "residues" in the milk supply, the U.S. Food & Drug Administration (FDA) requires that every truckload of milk - organic and regular - be tested for commonly used antibiotics when it arrives at the dairy processing plant. Any milk that is determined to be positive is rejected.

Dairy farmers take great pride in the nutritious food they produce and work to ensure that their milk meets all government and industry standards for safety and quality.





## What Makes A Dairy Farm Organic?

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U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) maintains rigorous standards for certified-organic milk. Under the rules, organic dairy farmers must demonstrate, among other things, that they use only organic fertilizers and pesticides, that their cows have access to pasture during the grazing season (at least 120 days per year) and that they do not use antibiotics or supplemental hormones. If an approved organic animal health treatment does not work, a sick cow must still be given all appropriate treatment(s) including antibiotics. However, once a cow is treated with antibiotics, the cow and its milk may no longer be sold as organic. Research shows organic and regular milk are equally safe and nutritious.

## The Last Word: Milk Quality & Freshness

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Cows are milked two to three times a day. Sanitized milking equipment delivers it directly from the cow to a holding tank in order to preserve freshness and safety. Along the way the milk is cooled as quickly as possible by the farm's refrigeration system.

Milk is then transported to a processing plant, where it is pasteurized for safety and to extend its shelf life and homogenized to prevent cream from rising to the top. Then it is packaged as a beverage, or made into cheese, yogurt and other dairy foods and dry dairy ingredients. These products nourish people in both the farmer's local community and the global marketplace.



For more information, please visit <http://dairygood.org>

