



Quality Assurance



Committed to Producing Safe, Wholesome Dairy

Everyone involved in U.S. Dairy—from farmers and cooperatives to processors, government representatives, and dairy institutions—works to ensure U.S. products meet strict U.S. regulatory standards and surpass customer and consumer requirements for quality and safety. Multi-layer protection steps support consistent delivery of wholesome dairy products from farms in the United States to tables around the world.

Safe Milk Starts on the Farm

Milk is kept fresh through a series of protective steps that start on the farm. U.S. dairy farmers, their employees, and support teams take good care of their cows, providing a balanced nutritious diet; plenty of fresh, clean water; and comfortable bedding. Farmers keep their cows cool in the summer with water misters/fans and protected from winter inclement conditions with curtains/shelters.

When it's time to be milked, the cows walk into the parlor. The cows' udders are inspected, cleaned, and attached to mechanical milking machines. Human

hands never touch the milk. Once collected, the milk is quickly cooled from 38.8° Celsius to 7.2° Celsius or less and is stored in stainless-steel, refrigerated bulk tanks. The milk is tested for quality and safety. Insulated milk trucks pick up the milk each day. If the farm is large, milk may be picked up multiple times per day to ensure that it's fresh and of the highest quality upon arrival at the processing plant. Before being unloaded at the plant, milk is tested again against quality and safety criteria. The milk is then pasteurized and bottled or converted into dairy products such as cheese, whey ingredients, milk powders and more.

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- Families own and operate more than 95 percent of the well over 30,000 dairy farms in the United States (Source: USDA, 2019 data)
- Most dairy cows like to spend their days in a barn. Barns provide comfortable housing and protection from extreme cold, heat, wind, and moisture.
- U.S. dairy farms—large and small—make animal care a top priority. Farmers typically spend a majority of their operating budget caring for their cows.



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High Standards for Cow Care and Comfort



U.S. dairy farmers work closely with animal nutritionists and veterinarians to provide nutritious diets and medical care that cows need to stay healthy and produce high-quality milk. Animal nutritionists ensure the cows eat a nutrient-rich, well-planned diet, which is consistently provided regardless of season. Nutritionally balanced rations known as total mixed rations (TMR) are tailored specifically to different groups of cows based on their ideal intake. This helps ensure that the animals receive a customized mix of ingredients to best meet their nutritional requirements and to help optimize production. Veterinarians regularly visit farms to assess the health and well-being of the cows to keep illnesses at bay.

If a cow does get sick, the farmer follows strict protocols to protect the cow, the health of the herd, and the safety of the milk. When detected, veterinarians work with farmers to diagnose and implement treatment protocols for the illness. While being treated, milk from the affected cow will be discarded. The cow's milk is only collected together with the herd's milk after the farmer and veterinarian in joint consultation determine that she is healthy, and any prescribed medication has cleared her system.

To further ensure milk quality and safety, government inspectors routinely visit the farm to counsel farmers and enforce regulations. In addition, on-farm evaluators work with farmers to ensure cows are healthy and treated well, in alignment with The National Dairy FARM Program.

What is the FARM Program?

Dedicated farmers. Healthy cows. Wholesome milk. That's what the FARM Program is all about. Open to all U.S. dairy farmers, co-ops and processors, the National Dairy FARM (Farmers Assuring Responsible Management) Program sets the highest standards when it comes to animal care. Third-party verification ensures the validity and the integrity of the program to customers and consumers. Created by the National Milk Producers Federation in partnership with Dairy Management Inc., FARM is the first livestock animal care program in the world to be recognized by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO).





Dairy Companies Carry Quality and Safety Forward

U.S. milk processors and manufacturers of dairy products and ingredients are fully invested in protecting the quality and safety of the milk they receive from U.S. dairy farmers. To deliver the finest products and ingredients to U.S. Dairy customers worldwide, they apply best practices for food safety and quality to reduce risk in dairy plant environments. They aspire to the highest standards and continuous improvement, often taking steps above, beyond, and in advance of regulatory requirements. Steps include:

- Analyzing vulnerable points in company processes and applying innovative and proven measures to ensure quality and detect/prevent contamination.
- Carefully adhering to and validating pasteurization requirements as established in the U.S. Pasteurized Milk Ordinance (PMO).
- Preventing the establishment or growth of pathogens through strict control programs and strengthened audit protocols, including Good Manufacturing Practices (GMPs), sanitation practices, and environmental monitoring.
- Aligning with recognized international standards such as the Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI) and Safe Quality Food (SQF) Institute.
- Achieving and maintaining International Organization for Standardization (ISO) certification, both for processes and products.

- Adopting industry-approved standards for dairy product traceability to track ingredients and finished products from farm to customer.

Government Oversight Further Protects Consumers

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) enforces national laws that enhance the safety of dairy products, foods, and beverages made in the United States. In addition, state and local authorities regularly visit dairy farms and plants to verify compliance with all the rules. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) protects animal health and makes recommendations regarding milk quality specification standards. In the United States, comprehensive, government standards and protocols are in place to ensure that pasteurized milk is produced safely.

The FDA oversees a set of standards known as the Pasteurized Milk Ordinance (PMO) that specifies time and temperature requirements for pasteurization. It meticulously details how dairy facilities and plants must be constructed, equipped, cleaned, sanitized, how milk must be handled, stored, and shipped. It also ensures consistent and rigorous inspections of dairy farms, processing facilities, and products across the United States. As a final check, U.S. dairy products and ingredients are tested at multiple, critical junctures from farm to plant to port. Only products that meet the U.S. government's rigorous standards are delivered to domestic and international food customers and consumers.





Ambitious Industry Protocols Enhance Traceability

As a global supplier of dairy products and ingredients, the U.S. dairy industry is committed to always knowing where in the United States these products were made, the source of the milk used to make them, and where they are in the supply chain. That knowledge comes from a set of highly tested and proven best practices and processes now being adopted by U.S. dairy companies nationwide. The U.S. dairy industry's "Guidance for Dairy Product Enhanced Traceability" was developed by the Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy and vetted with U.S. processors. More than 80% of U.S. dairy companies have committed to adopting these voluntary standards which include three primary pillars:

- Modeling physical plants to know where new lots enter and where products transform.
- Creating a lot identifying mark that is recognized and used by customers.
- Record-keeping that assists in expedient and effective recall capability.

What does the U.S. dairy industry's adoption of traceability protocols mean for customers? In the unlikely event a product is contaminated in the plant or compromised in route, U.S. suppliers can quickly identify the affected product (typically in less than two hours) and isolate or retrieve it. Furthermore, the technology and rigorous processes required to achieve this higher standard of traceability improves overall product quality and safety.

Our Commitment and Dedication

Customers and consumers can feel confident that U.S. farmers, processors, animal nutritionists, veterinarians, regulators, and everyone throughout the U.S. dairy production value chain are committed to ensuring a safe, high-quality milk supply. They firmly believe protecting the health and safety of the people who consume U.S. dairy products around the world is the right thing to do. Through strict compliance with government regulations, adherence to recognized standards, and continuous improvement, they demonstrate commitment in all they do. Rest assured you can count on the United States for products and ingredients you can trust and enjoy.

Certifications

The U.S. dairy industry recognizes customer and consumer requirements for products that comply with religious, lifestyle and other dietary needs, such as halal and kosher. Many U.S. dairy suppliers routinely secure third-party certification, and certification is also possible upon customer request. Please reach out to your dairy supplier with any specific questions and requests.



GET IN TOUCH

Looking for more information about the U.S. dairy industry and its quality and safety commitment to customers?

Visit ThinkUSAdairy.org to discover more about U.S. dairy farming and manufacturing processes from farm to table.

To learn more and find a USDEC representative near you, go to ThinkUSAdairy.org/global-presence.