

# CHEESE MARKET NEWS®

The Weekly Newspaper Of The Nation's Cheese And Dairy/Deli Business

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## Cheese contests attracting more entries, new cheese varieties

By Alyssa Sowerwine

**MADISON, Wis.** — The boom in cheese contest entries in recent years may reflect the value an award can have on sales and marketing for cheesemakers, as well as expanding consumer preferences for different types of cheese.

While increasing entry numbers can be challenging for contest coordinators, it's what they like to call a "good" problem, says John Umhoefer, executive director, Wisconsin Cheese Mak-

ers Association (WCMA).

WCMA sponsors the recently-held 2010 World Championship Cheese Contest as well as the U.S. Championship Cheese Contest. The world contest is held on even-numbered years, while the U.S. contest is held on odd-numbered years.

Another rapidly-growing dairy product competition—the World Dairy Expo Championship Dairy Product Contest, sponsored by the Wisconsin Dairy Products Association (WDPA) — will have 67 different categories this year, encompassing a wide range of dairy products including cheese, butter, milk, ice cream, yogurt and more.

"This contest has exceeded our wildest expectations," says Brad Legreid, executive director, WDPA. "The contest is appealing to dairy companies throughout North America due to its uniqueness. No other contest offers such a comprehensive representation of dairy categories for judging consideration."

According to Umhoefer, as contest entries begin to fill up each class, subcategories are created to lessen the strain on judges.

For example, smear-ripened cheeses may be divided into two

classes for semi-soft and hard varieties, he says.

"You have to do more subcategories with higher volumes of entries — more than 20 in a class is a lot for one judge," says DCI Cheese Co.'s Dominique Delugeau, senior vice president of sales, who has judging experience, most recently with the 2010 World Championship Cheese Contest.

"Judging can be mentally and physically tiring, and you want to be as sharp with the first sample as you are with sample No. 15, for example," he adds.

Delugeau says when thinking of contest classes that have recently expanded, three come to mind: Fresh Mozzarella, smear and wash-rinded cheeses, and semi-soft cheeses such as Parmesan or Gruyere.

The number of Fresh Mozzarella contest entries in recent years has expanded largely due to the varieties of flavored, rubbed and otherwise infused types now available in the marketplace.

Umhoefer notes the number of entries of Fresh Mozzarella in the World Championship Cheese Contest increased from 36 entries in 2008 to 47 in 2010.

In addition, smoked cheese

entries increased from 40 entries two years ago to 60 this year.

"We also had 40 entries of mold-ripened cheeses this year," he adds. "I think that's a trend that's going to pick up."

Goat and sheep's milk cheese varieties also have expanded in recent years, says David Grotenstein, general manager of Union Market, Brooklyn, N.Y., and judging and competition chair for the American Cheese Society (ACS). ACS holds an annual competition in the summer.

Grotenstein also emphasizes the importance of limiting the amount of cheeses assigned to one judge in a contest.

Grotenstein says a large surge in cow's milk Blue cheeses in last year's ACS contest resulted in the decision to break into subcategories of "rind" and "no rind."

He says in his opinion there is no set reason for the expansion of certain classes.

"I think cheesemakers make what they make well," he says.

"We had to break fresh goat cheeses into subcategories last year because the number of entries was just too vast," he adds.

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## Shelf-stable dairy products moving toward sustainability

By Rena Archwamety

**MADISON, Wis.** — When looking for dairy products, U.S. consumers typically gravitate toward the refrigerated dairy case. But with advances in shelf-stable technology and new products entering the market, dairy products are no longer limited to the cold seat next to the egg cartons.

Shelf-stable dairy products offer greater convenience for increasingly busy lifestyles, whether it's flavored milk found at a work vending machine or drinkable yogurt packed in a school lunch.

"As consumption moves increasingly out of the home and on the go, I certainly hope there will be products for people to buy in all new usage occasions," says Gail Barnes, vice president technology and packaging, Dairy Management Inc. (DMI).

"The key to getting those products into new usage is shelf-stable," Barnes adds. "Anything, anywhere, any time, our products have to be in an arm's length of the consumer."

In May, Steuben Foods Inc. and its affiliate Whitney's Foods will launch two shelf-stable dairy items aimed at these on-the-go consumers: Whitney's Yo on the Go drinkable yogurt and NuMu fat-free flavored milk.

Both products are aseptically packaged in spill-proof 6-ounce Tetra Pak boxes. Yo on the Go is fortified with DHA/Omega 3, comes in strawberry, banana berry and mixed berry flavors, and has a six-month shelf life. NuMu comes in Mocha Mania, Screamin' Strawberry and Extreme Hot Fudge, with more flavors to be introduced later, and has a 9-month shelf life.

"They do taste better when chilled, but they don't have to be refrigerated and can be thrown in a lunch box or diaper bag. They travel well," says Tracy Bianchi, marketing manager, Steuben Foods.

Dairy Farmers of America (DFA) contract manufactures a number of shelf-stable dairy products, from infant formulas to protein drinks to cheese dips, and has been using shelf-stable processing technology for more than 40 years.

Kelly Piercy, senior director of technical development, has been with DFA for 16 years working with shelf-stable products. He has seen certain

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## Dairy Industry Advisory Committee holds meeting

**WASHINGTON** — A group of 17 men and women representing the dairy industry met at USDA headquarters this week to discuss solutions to the volatile pricing of milk and milk products that has decreased dairy industry profits and caused many operations to close.

"We need a relatively quick response from this group," said U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack in opening remarks to the newly-formed Dairy Industry Advisory Committee. "I hope at the end of this you can come up with a common solution that you can recommend to us and that we can present to the rest of the industry."

The committee, established last August by USDA, was designed to advise the agriculture secretary on policy issues impacting the dairy industry. The three-day public meeting allowed members

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## Whole Foods, PCC drop raw milk; bill passes Wis. Senate

**AUSTIN, Texas** — Two natural foods chains, Austin, Texas-based Whole Foods Market and Seattle-based PCC Natural Markets, recently discontinued the sale of raw milk in stores that can legally sell raw milk products. This affects Whole Foods stores in California, Washington, Pennsylvania and Connecticut, and all nine PCC stores in Washington.

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## NEWS/BUSINESS



### SHELF

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items grow in popularity and demand in recent years.

"Coffee dairy beverages is a trend that took off in the late '90s and has been going ever since," he says. "There is a trend now toward healthy products and nutraceuticals that taste good and deliver a healthy benefit."

Shelf-stable dairy products still are more popular and widely-available in other countries than in the United States.

"Europe and Canada really have accepted Tetra Pak for shelf-stable products more than the U.S.," Bianchi says. "If you go to Europe and Canada, you see it in all different types of products. In the U.S. it's only in a very select number. But you have a lot of the younger generation growing up with juice-box packaging and more apt to accept it."

Barnes says part of the difference in acceptance of shelf-stable products lies in how dairy is used in the United States vs. in other countries. People in the United States tend to drink more fluid milk and buy it in gallon jugs, while people in many parts of Europe use milk more as an ingredient and buy it in liters, boxes and pouches.

"One thing to realize about shelf-stable is that it really dominates in Europe and places people don't really drink milk but use it as an additive," Barnes says. "Also, they don't have the refrigerator space. It's absolutely different in how people use milk compared to the U.S."

#### • Sterilization processes

UHT (ultra-high temperature or ultra-heat treatment) processing, where the product is brought to a high enough temperature to kill bacterial spores, is the dominant and globally-recognized method of producing shelf-stable dairy products.

The traditional and most widely-used version of this technology is retort processing or in-container sterilization, where the product and its container are heated at the same time in a process similar to canning. A more recently-developed method, aseptic processing, heats the product at a higher temperature for a shorter amount of time before it is put into a sterilized container and sealed.

Some companies favor aseptic processing as a means to preserve a flavor profile.

"The process we use, where sterile steam is infused into the product and extracted before packaging, protects the integrity of the product and the flavor profile. You get a great-tasting product," Bianchi says of NuMu and Yo on the Go.

Other companies choose retort processing because it has been proven for many years and is more familiar to those in the industry.

"The equipment, you ask anyone in the industry, and there is a comfort

level in the canning (retort, in-container sterilization) process and the product sterility is higher than in the aseptic process," Piercy says of why DFA uses this method. "It's a lower-risk process, a well-established process."

Piercy adds that the difference in flavor profile sometimes can be an advantage for the retort process.

"The consumer has to decide what they find acceptable," he says. "A lot of people like the conventional canning process because of the caramelization, the character that's indigenous to the canning process."

Piercy adds that DFA also uses variations on the retort, in-container sterilization process such as heating and

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### URSCHEL

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uncommon for many plants worldwide to have multiple machines manufactured by Urschel Laboratories.


The company also caters to its customers by offering them the opportunity to view the test cutting of their product. In addition, Urschel Laboratories provides reports with photos and/or videos to aid in the evaluation process.

"We will dice or shred or cut or granulate the product that customers bring us to their specification," O'Brien says. "That is a service we offer free of charge around the world in order to show customers what our machinery is capable of."

Company loyalty also is evident among Urschel Laboratories' employees. According to Dave Whitenack, plant manager, Urschel Laboratories, the average employee has worked with the company for about 15 years, and the majority of people hired retire from there as well.

To honor its employees and the company's 100 years, Urschel Laboratories — now operated by third and fourth generations of the Urschel family — plans to hold a celebration June 20.

"The company is very much involved in the community, and it will be a Valparaiso, Ind., and Porter County event," O'Brien says. "It sticks with the Urschel tradition as far as staying close to its roots." **CMN**



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## NEWS/BUSINESS



## STABLE

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cooling the product with full water immersion or full water spray. Meanwhile, DFA continues to study new technologies such as continuous microwave heating and high-pressure processing.

"We really try to take a look at the new technology out there for pasteurizing and sterilizing a product to see how they might fit our needs," he says.

• **Innovation for the environment**

Another new technology currently under development for shelf-stable dairy processing involves not heat, but rather light as a means to kill pathogens.

Jim Cullor, associate dean of clinical programs, University of California-Davis

School of Veterinary Medicine, is leading the technical research on the commercial viability of non-thermal ultraviolet processing technology as an alternative to pasteurization. The prototype will be applied to refrigerated and eventually shelf-stable dairy products.

This research is one of several projects within the Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions. If approved by FDA, the technology could save the industry more than \$30 million and 272,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalents per year.

"We're looking at the dose of light, wavelength of light and the time required to inactivate these potential pathogens. After we get that part done, then we look at what's the lowest dose we can use to

inactivate the pathogens," Cullor says.

The team has been working on this project a little over a year, and Cullor says it could take three to five years to develop the technology, clear regulatory hurdles and get it ready to enter the market. The research is part of an international effort that also includes Dairy Innovation Australia Ltd.

• **Clean is key**

Most shelf-stable dairy products have "best-by" or "sell-by" dates ranging from six to 24 months, though expiration dates often are misunderstood, Piercy says. Shelf-stable products remain safe to consume for a much longer time, though their quality and flavor will diminish earlier.

"With most of these shelf-stable products, it's not when the product expires

that it's unsafe to consume," Piercy says, adding that even a five- to 10-year-old product could pose no health risk if its container holds its integrity.

Barnes says shelf life and quality of shelf-stable dairy products depend on three factors: the product itself, the environment and the packaging.

"It's only as strong as the weakest link in the chain. One microorganism, and you no longer have a commercially-aseptic or shelf-stable product," she says.

"Processing gives you a clean product; if you don't have a clean environment, you get recontamination; if you don't have a clean package, you get recontamination," Barnes says. "Clean, every step of processing, gives it quality and shelf life." **CMN**

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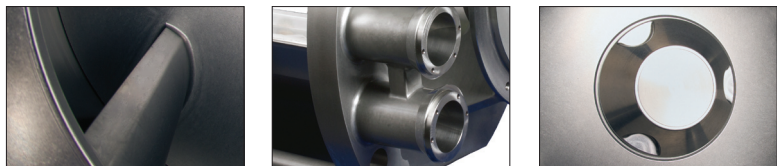
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**MCT unveils new, improved website**

MILBURN, N.J. — MCT Dairies Inc. recently launched an improved website, www.mctdairies.com. The new site details the types of services and products unique to MCT and its niche in the dairy industry, as well as the most current dairy market prices. Visitors can find detailed information about MCT's products and services by following the "dancing downs" on the home page.

"We are pleased to launch our new website which reflects the evolution of our product and service offerings to our existing and potential customers," says Ken Meyers, president and CEO, MCT. "We welcome industry participants to sign up for our monthly newsletter, *The Compass*."

In addition to a list of products and services, MCT says its site can serve as a complete source of valuable resources to the dairy industry. **CMN**

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