

MILCH CONCEPT ... WHAT A CONCEPT!

The large picture you see on this page depicts European dairy farmers' solution to low milk prices. It's an automated milk dispensing machine that offers consumers the opportunity to buy truly local, farm-fresh milk ... without them having to drive out to the farm. How convenient for both the producer as well as the consumer!

This particular vending machine is located inside the entrance of a supermarket in Rostock, Germany. Roughly translated, the wording on the machine reads:

Fresh milk direct from the farm. Fresh, regional (local), fair Day-fresh whole milk, pasteurized, 4.2% butterfat, minimum; at 4 to 7 degrees Celsius, will keep for at least 6 days. The milk sells for 1.40 euros per Liter or .70 euro per half Liter. That's approximately \$1.65 per quart and 81 cents per pint. Per hundredweight, that comes to a whopping \$76.75!



It appears that those machines would pay for themselves rather quickly. Manufactured by DF Italia in northern Italy near Venice, these machines are also designed and approved for self-service raw milk sales off the farm. The company has a sizable offering of high-tech dispensing machines ranging from pharmaceuticals and wine to meat and milk.

(Please visit www.dfitalia.com and the German website www.milchautomat.net for more information.

Interestingly, on the German website, one of the first sentences asks: "You no longer want to give your milk away?" It's a sales pitch, of course; the company backs the machine with plenty of credentials. The machine is advertised as easy to service and approved for use throughout the European Union. In Germany alone, they appear on-site in eight supermarket chains.

Farmers can buy these machines and set them up at places frequented by consumers, such as a supermarket, convenience store, farmer's market, etc. They bring their milk directly from the farm in various size tanks (approximately 50, 100 or 150 gallons) which are placed inside the machine to supply customers' needs.

We took note that the whole milk offered by the farmer who owns this machine (pictured) contains a minimum of 4.2% butterfat. That's 20 percent more butterfat than standard whole milk (3.5%) in the U.S.

Meanwhile, the United States Department of Agriculture has dictated for nearly a decade that no whole milk be made available in our public schools ... effectively assuring that young people have no desire to ever drink milk. And our major producer organizations, as well as advertising and promotion agencies have watched it happen right under their noses without even protesting, let alone put up a fight. (Don't hold your breath for this to change anytime soon. We do have a few leaders and politicians who favor the change; but at the very top, it's just hollow talk.)

My trip to Germany during the last week in July once again offered proof that the Europeans are more than a few steps ahead of us. It's been nearly four decades since the Dutch introduced robotic milking and just as long ago since I witnessed what I called "precision farming" at the time. That and much more has arrived at our shores over the past half century, especially during the last 25 years.

Now, maybe we can look forward to seeing automated vending machines for milk ... owned and operated by producers. Wow, what a concept!

The Europeans have them. Why don't we? It's likely that USDA and FDA would argue about quality and sanitation standards and demand trials and studies that require years to complete. The fact remains, however, the European Union's quality and sanitation standards exceed our own.

But we can hope, can't we?

This concept is worth milking, folks.

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