

By Chris Aldridge
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Barren County dairy farmer H.H. Barlow is seeing first-hand the difference that his product can make for the 1 in 7 adults in Kentucky that are food insecure.

Barlow, who also serves as executive director of the Kentucky Dairy Development Council (KDDC), has been helping distribute free milk and other dairy products to Kentuckians at various locations across the state.

The first four giveaways were held during Dairy Month in June. At the first dairy giveaway June 17 in Russell Springs, Barlow recalled taking a break and walking to a nearby grocery store, where he was questioned by a cashier.

“She said, ‘What are y’all doing down there?’” Barlow remembered. “I said, ‘Giving away milk.’ She said, ‘I’d love to have some!’ so I told her, ‘I’ll bring you a box.’”

Each box from dairy processor Prairie Farms not only contained two gallons of milk, two pints of chocolate milk, and two pints of strawberry-flavored milk, but it also included a container each of cottage cheese, cream cheese, French onion dip, and sour cream.

When Barlow returned to the store a few hours later carrying the large box, the cashier was overjoyed.

“The lady saw me and said, ‘You’re serious!’” Barlow said. “It made my day to see the appreciation on her face. Even though she had a job, you could tell she needed some help.”

Barlow related another story about an elderly couple who pulled up to the Russell Springs giveaway in a car.

“The driver was a woman about (age) 70 or 80, and the gentleman beside her was not in good shape,” he recalled. “I asked her, ‘Would you like a second box?’ She said, ‘You’re kidding! Sir, I’m starving; I’d love a second box.’

“That made me choke up,” Barlow admitted. “She said she had some neighbors that were hungry too but not able to get out, so I gave her six boxes.”

The dairy giveaways are funded by the \$19-billion federal Coronavirus Food Assistance Program, or CFAP, which provided \$3 billion in food for hungry Americans.

“Dairy came out very well in that situation,” Barlow said. “Processing milk to give away in trailer load lots is a big deal for both our dairy farmers and processors. That’s a tremendous amount of milk that has created a very big demand, which has really helped our price at the farm level.”

“The dairy industry has been hit hard these last few years,” Kentucky Agriculture Commissioner Dr. Ryan Quarles told WNKY-TV while helping distribute milk during a giveaway June 24 in Glasgow.

Quarles noted that although the number has been falling, Kentucky is still home to more than 400 dairy farms.

“Getting fresh milk across the state with our dairy farmer network is a win-win,” he added. “Not only does it help farmers, but it helps those in need right now.”

The contract to provide dairy products in Kentucky was awarded to Borden and Prairie Farms.

“They went straight to the food banks and filled them up,” Barlow said.

That left a whole lot of milk that needed to be distributed, so Barlow volunteered himself and his small KDDC staff.

“I heard about it, and I thought it would be an activity that KDDC should be involved in,” he said, noting he also receives help from local FFA students and other volunteers.

For each giveaway event, Borden and Prairie Farms supply a refrigerated semi-trailer full of milk and other dairy products. All the companies ask is that they distribute all the items in one day.

“We had to empty those trucks in a day’s time so those companies could get them back on the road,” Barlow said.

The first two giveaways were huge successes.

“We set up in Russell Springs at 8 o’clock (on a Wednesday morning),” Barlow said, noting the event alongside busy U.S. Highway 127 was publicized by a local

radio station. “It started out 50 cars long and never slowed down. In three hours, we gave away a whole semi load (1,320 Prairie Farms boxes). It was crazy!

“It was a great opportunity to put a focus on milk, which is basically our mission – to improve the profitability of dairy farmers. This is extremely neat because, in that box, there may a dairy product that somebody might have never tried, so he or she could become a new customer.”

The next giveaway was in Tollesboro in Lewis County near Flemingsburg.

“We set up at a little fairgrounds you couldn’t see from the highway,” Barlow said. “This time, it took four hours to empty the trailer. It was unreal. It just felt like we were really helping some people that can use it.”

Quarles helped hand out milk June 24 at Barren County High School in Glasgow.

“We were really excited to have the commissioner down here,” Barlow said. “This is right down his Hunger Initiative alley.”

One of the Barren Countians waiting in line for two free gallons of milk per car was Heather Reynolds of Park City.

“It helps my family as well as many other families that I know that’s not gonna be able to get milk ‘cause they can’t find it or can’t afford it,” she told WNKY-TV.

After Quarles and other volunteers gave away about 700 of the 4,224 gallons of Borden milk that morning in Glasgow, the truck moved to nearby Brownsville in the afternoon, where demand doubled. About half of the load that was not distributed was donated to Barren County and Metcalfe County high schools.

Two more giveaways were held in late June in Lebanon and Hopkinsville.

Two giveaways have been confirmed in July: Russellville on July 2 and Columbia on July 7, but more will follow this summer.

“We’re going to try to have a whole bunch of these at 12 to 14 different locations around Kentucky,” Barlow said, noting the giveaways will continue through the end of August. “We’re trying to do two during most weeks on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

“We’re pretty excited about it; it’s a great thing,” he added. “It focuses people’s attention on dairy while giving them something that’s extremely nutritious.”