

Edge Dairy Farmer Cooperative: Whole milk option for schoolkids good for children, good for dairy farmers

Posted on Tuesday, Feb 12, 2019

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John Holevoet, director of government affairs -

If you get a group of dairy farmers together to discuss the challenges facing the industry, you won't have to wait long before someone mentions the decline in fluid milk consumption. There is no doubt this is a problem for the dairy community. There is also a direct link behind this and the decline in the milk check.

Fluid milk's falling sales have many causes:

- We have seen the erosion of our market share by plant-based beverages, many of which illegally use the term "milk" to portray their products as wholesome and nutritious. Edge and many of our members have submitted comments to the Food and Drug Administration to help stop this practice.
- Breakfast consumption has declined and the type of breakfast many people are having is changing. Milk used to be the co-star of breakfast along with its beloved castmate cereal. As cereal sales slump, fluid milk has done the same.
- The proliferation of more beverage choices has also squeezed fluid milk's share of that market. The fact that our marketing and packaging is often

lackluster by comparison has not helped either.

These issues call for tailored solutions. This is not a complete list. There is another significant one: Fluid milk has not been able to put its best (tastiest and most appealing) foot forward with our youngest customers.

Schoolchildren have access to fluid milk in cafeterias across the country, but we generally serve them skim or unflavored one percent milk in difficult-to-open, often under-chilled cartons. Where school districts have done the work of applying for a waiver, kids might have one or two more options, but their choices are still pretty limited.

Lifelong eating habits are being established in school cafeterias. We must do a better job of appealing to our youngest customers and we need the government to get out of our way to make that possible.

A new bipartisan bill would allow regular and flavored whole milk as options for schoolchildren. The measure was introduced by U.S. Rep. Glenn “GT” Thompson, R-Pa., and Chairman of the House Agriculture Committee Collin Peterson, D-Minn. The Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act of 2019 (H.R. 832) recognizes the importance of milk as part of a healthy diet, especially for growing children. It also acknowledges a growing body of research that shows that full-fat dairy products are not to be avoided. In fact, full-fat dairy can help keep certain ailments at bay.

The legislation is primarily being supported by lawmakers from the northeastern United States. Edge is working to draw attention to the bill and to increase support for the idea in the Upper Midwest, where our members farm. Right now, Chairman Peterson and Rep. Rodney Davis (R-Ill.) are the only legislators from our part of the country who are cosponsoring the bill.

Offering whole milk to kids in school will not alone solve the problem of low milk prices and it will not alone reverse the declines in fluid milk consumption, but it is one part of a multipronged strategy to boost domestic consumption that should help with both issues. Edge is always looking to support opportunities to do that. It is part of our core mission to be the voice for our farmers – the voice of milk.

Photo: [Click here](#) for a headshot of John Holevoet

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school option

About Edge:

Edge Dairy Farmer Cooperative provides dairy farmers in nine Midwestern states with a powerful voice — the voice of milk — in Congress, with customers and within their communities. Under the Federal Milk Marketing Orders, the co-op also provides milk testing verification services and market information. Edge, based in Green Bay, Wis., is one of the top cooperatives in the country based on the amount of milk produced by its members. For more information, visit voiceofmilk.com.