$86/cwt. received by Washington State raw milk dairy

Raw Milk, Cow–Share Dairy Nets $500 Per Cow Per Month

by Pete Hardin

Heard about the dairy that posts net profits (excluding labor) of $500 per month … *per cow*?

Calvert's Castle dairy, located near Medicine Lake, Washington (just west of Spokane) defies common "success models" featured in most dairy farming publications. Calvert's Castle is operated by George and Judy Calvert. Their net profit per cow is $500 per month, excluding their own labor costs. George and Judy milk seven cows.

The Calverts operate a raw milk, cow-share program. Their customers invest in half-gallon shares of cow's milk, to be picked up weekly. For each $40 stock investment, consumers may pick up one half-gallon of raw milk packaged in their own sanitized, glass bottles. Shareholders also pay a fee of $3.25 per half-gallon for filling the bottle.

That $3.25 fee was recently raised by $.25 to cover rising costs of organic grain, which George Calvert fees his Jersey, Milking Shorthorn, and Jersey-Milking Shorthorn-cross herd.

That price per half-gallon equals roughly $85.00 per hundred pounds for whole milk. (Note: The Calverts do not sell certified organic milk, but they do feed organic grain to their milk cows.)

Costs are minimal at the Calvert dairy. George Calvert, who grew up hand-milking a Jersey as a kid, doesn't need a bulk tank. He pays no milk hauling fees, no co-op dues. Each cow has 50 "shares" sold, at $40 apiece: generating $2000. That money is used to replace cows when their milking careers are over.

Raw milk demand exploding … controversial

Consumer demand for raw milk is expanding dramatically across the U.S. Some consumers believe that pasteurization denatures many of the beneficial health aspects contained in raw milk from healthy cows. In some parts of the country, *The Milkweed* hears reports of prices as high as $10 to $12 per gallon for raw milk.

Consumer demand for unpasteurized, whole milk is based upon the beneficial aspects of milk fat from milk of healthy cows. For dairy cows that have been grazed on pasture, the perceived health benefits of higher levels of Omega-3 and Omega-6 acids are very highly valued.

(Note: Raw milk sales are legal in 28 states in the U.S. The concept of raw milk "shareholders" is based on consumers drinking their own raw milk. The Calvert's price of $3.25 per gallon is a service fee. Interested persons are advised to first check with their state health authorities.)

George and Judy Calvert are modestly prospering selling raw milk in glass bottles to their shareholders. Importantly, they believe they're making a positive contribution to nutrition of their customers.

George Calvert is an active proponent of this "share-milk" dairy system. He has started seminars for interested persons to learn about his "micro" success model. The title of those seminars is "Creating Ca$h with a Ca$h Cow." He believes that by using his dairy herd and the adjoining Farm Store as models, other families can enjoy both the profits of raw milk, share-holder dairying … as well as the additional benefits of nutritious foods. Home-schooling families and retirees are two groups the Calverts believe they target for their system of dairying.

In George Calvert's voice, one can hear the surety of his faith in the value of their raw beverage milk. A long, tough path brought the Calverts to this endeavor. Personal experience convinced the 66-year old George Calvert of the beneficial aspects of raw milk from healthy cows.

Health problems ruined Calvert's other business

In his late fifties/early sixties, George Calvert was running a successful electrical contracting business in the Spokane area, a business he'd built from scratch and operated for 33 years. He had as many as 54 employees. The firm specialized in industrial security.

But then horrid health problems struck George.

He was disabled by continuing, severe gastro-enteric distress, forcing him to spend many hours a day on the toilet. Health problems kept him from running his business, which fell into bankruptcy. Mercifully, the local bank allowed the Calverts to keep their home and an adjoining few acres. The IRS "hoped" George and Judy could at least pay the mortgage on their home's mortgage.

Then, a near-miracle occurred.

George heard about how a diet of raw organic milk might help solve his bowel distress. But he absolutely could not buy raw organic milk to try the cure. In his condition, the last thing George wanted to do was to buy a cow and start milking it. But that's what he had to do, in order to obtain raw milk.

"Brie," a gentle Milking Shorthorn still in the Calvert's herd, was purchased, and George milked her and drank her raw milk. Within two weeks, the years long, disabling bout with bowel distress ended. Calvert was again a healthy, if financially destitute, man.

What to do?

George Calvert thought hard how to rebuild his life. He contemplated his miraculous recovery from disabling bowel distress that drinking raw, organic milk had brought into his life. He remembered how, as a kid, he'd hand-milked his mother's Jersey cow. The Calverts retained a few acres of under-utilized pasture next to their home. A light went on in George's brain: he could try selling raw milk … a product in which he personally believed!

Four years later …

Calvert's Castle has been in business selling raw milk to shareholders for four years. George and Judy have polished their business model. Sideline endeavors have built up, as shareholders want to purchase additional wholesome foods. "Milk is just the popcorn portion of the 'poppycock' we're selling," he explains. Other items such as fruits, vegetables, beef, pork and cage-free eggs are sold at the adjoining "Farm Store" where shareholders pick up their half-gallons of raw, whole milk.

"I have sold in advance just about every half-gallon I fill," George explains. Any additional milk that's unsold becomes food for Calvert's hogs, whose pork is sold at the Farm Store.

Two other types of merchandise are found in the Calverts' Farm Store:

• An array of organic foods sold through the "Azure Standard" brand. Azure Standard ships organic foods to customers. But by designating Calvert's Castle as a "distributing point" for the Azure Standard line of products, the Calverts are able to save their shareholders roughly the 10% shipping fee on the products they order. They also sell bulk quantities of certified organic grain, distributing it to individuals and other farm stores.

• A small library of books, brochures and pamphlets about the nutritional value of natural foods. Materials from the Weston A. Price Foundation are popular, such as Sally Fallon's books *Nourishing Traditions* and *The Untold Story of Milk*.

It's a "package" of food, nutrition and knowledge that the Calverts both sell and espouse. Without his health restored by raw, whole milk, George Calvert could be in the poorhouse … or six feet under. He's survived to be an exponent of the raw milk story.

Only milking seven cows right now …

George Calvert milks four to seven cows, depending on their lactation stages. The "milking barn" is a 10'x 14' foot area in an old garage. He uses old Surge "belly milkers" for milking machines. But he strongly advocates using IPM "see-thru" silicon inflations. George is limited by carpal tunnel syndrome and doesn't want to "strip out" the quarters at the end of milking. By carefully watching the milk flow through the silicon inflations, he can monitor when each quarter is milked out.

The milk is transferred directly into an old 14-gallon stainless steel receiving tank mounted on a welded stand. Calvert then fills the half-gallon, glass bottles from a spout at the bottom of the receiving jar. The bottles of warm milk are promptly placed inside the three refrigerators in the adjoining Farm Store.

Shareholders pick up their half-gallon only on Tuesdays. At the same time, they return sterilized bottles for the next week's milk pick-up. Limiting pickups to once a week allows the Calverts to control traffic to their dairy and dedicate one day per week to marketing at the Farm Store.

Having shareholders pick up their milk weekly—instead of the Calver's delivering it—is seen as a most efficient use of the Calvert's time. Plus, shareholders purchase additional items at the Farm Store. Many purchase Calvert's Castle raw, whole milk because of health reasons.

In a year's time, the Calverts see about a 20% turnover in their customers. Demand is strong and growing.

Healthy lifestyles … healthy foods

At the four-year mark, Calvert's Castle raw milk sales are turning a nice profit for the owners. But there are greater rewards than mere money that accrue to George and Judy Calvert. George knows well his own physical infirmities that drove him to bankruptcy … and the remedy that raw, whole milk offered. He's glad to share what he believes are his life-giving dairy products. "When you hear some of the stories of these folks and their suffering, it make you cry inside," he admits.

In retrospect, going bankrupt may have extended George's longevity and quality of life. "I was killing myself from diet. A body can only handle so many toxins, and then it stores them in fat. When I learned that … beef, pork, chicken … we had to create our own food supply," he explains. "We stopped eating many processed foods."

Several shareholders have autistic children. They tell the Calverts that by drinking raw milk, their children sleep better at night.

George hopes to milk another 10 years. He's designing a new, sunken milking area for his milking herd. An $85/cwt. farm milk price lets the Calverts modernize … modestly.

The Calverts schedule seminars explaining their raw milk marketing "shareholder" system just about every month. The seminars cost $150 per person and are conducted at the Calvert's dairy. "Starter sets" of materials are also marketed by the Calverts. Interested persons may contact George Calvert at:

Calvert's Castle — Ph.: 509-244-3884
187230 W. 5th Ave. — Fax: 509-244-1794
Medical Lake, WA 99224

Senate Panel Questions MPC

The Senate Appropriations Committee reported on June 27 their recommendations on appropriation for agriculture for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2006.

On page 155 we find, "*Standards of Identity*- The Committee is aware of the ongoing debate surrounding increased importation and use of milk protein concentrate. A General Accounting Office investigation highlighted a dramatic increase in milk protein concentrate imports. The Committee remains concerned with FDA's current lack of enforcement of standards of identity as it relates to the potential illegal use of milk protein concentrate in standardized cheese."

January through May import data show a 43.1% increase in Chapter 4 MPC imports. It's not all going into the Atkins Diet.

MPC is not a legal food ingredient in any food. It has no definition and it has no generally recognized as safe (GRAS) status by qualified experts. Numerous other concerns such as nutrition remain unanswered. Yet, imports and use on MPCs continues to increase which ignores consumer issues while significantly decreasing farm milk price.