A2 Milk: Golden Opportunity for Dairy

by Ken Rabbas

(EDITOR'S NOTE: In this article we refer to the subject as “A2 milk.” The first which owns the patent and trademark rights is the A2 Corp. of New Zealand.)

A2 milk has been previously covered in The Milkweed, but let’s revisit this potentially important dairy consumption trend. A2 milk first came to public attention in 1979 with the release of Keith Woodford's book, “Devil in the Milk.” Dr. Woodford is a Professor of Agri-Food Systems at Lincoln University, in New Zealand.

Early on, Woodford absorbed plenty of criticism from New Zealand's dairy industry. NZ dairy interests scorned his detailing the problem associated with A1 milk's potential human health negatives. In truth, Woodford merits commendation for researching and detailing the health benefits A2 milk. He has a website at Lincoln University: https://keithwoodford.wordpress.com

Woodford occasionally posts updates on A2 milk issues. Much of this article derives directly from Woodford’s posts, which generally cover recent developments. Keith Woodford's comments allowed us to catch up on the last several years work of A1 versus A2. Just a brief review of the health benefits A2 milk.

Let me explain these strong opinions about A2 milk. I became aware of A2 milk a dozen years ago, when Gerard Fry explained A2 issues following his visit New Zealand. In 2013, I reread Dr. Woodford’s book “A2 milk: Tremendous future opportunity” and decided it is worthwhile to go back and re-read the science behind A2 milk – important information missed during the first reading. Rereading that book afforded a better understanding of the science.

The first week of January 2014, I did a Google search for Keith Woodford A2 milk, and found the above-mentioned post at Lincoln University. I read the posts from 2010 and 2011. With a four-month old son, the health information I read became both scary and emotionally charged. Young children and grandchildren are expected to have a much deeper understanding of food and environmental issues. So I hope readers will excuse my writing this article with emotion that may push beyond readers' comfort zones. At the basic levels: I believe that A2 milk offers a wonderful opportunity for the U.S. dairy industry. But in the likely future scenario of “out with the old, in with the new,” we’ll witness controversy and collateral damage in our indigenous dairy industry.

A2: tremendous future opportunity

A2 milk offers great opportunity to improve the health and well-being of family members, friends, and neighbors. At our home, we have our own grass-fed, A2, real milk. Most people have to depend on what is in the grocery store. Currently no A2 options may be found on supermarket shelves for consumers. This is about to change. Consumer demand for A2 milk today, is to find a source of raw A2 milk and decide whether to home-pasteurize, or not.

Expect increased consumer interest in A2 raw milk, if the U.S. dairy industry doesn’t offer commercial A2 products. I’m not advocating raw milk, rather, I am encouraging the dairy industry to give future consumers what they will want, so they don’t have to turn to raw milk. Let’s expand our sometimes “dairy tunnel vision” to imagine A2 milk as a tremendous opportunity for the dairy industry.

Australia has become the most successful market for A2 milk. And A2 milk sales are being conducted successfully in Great Britain. Those two countries – modern and English-speaking – can serve as valid “test plots” for the U.S. market.

Last year, Dr. Woodford wrote three articles for the Fairfax NZ Sunday Star Times (August 24, 31, and September 7). Those series updated and summarized A2 milk issues. I will be quoting heavily from these articles.

From Woodford's Aug. 24, 2014 article

“Evidence that A1-beta-casein might be a human health issue has been available for more than 15 years. However the mainstream dairy industry has always fought against the notion that it matters. Within the last year, The A2 Milk Company has also launched an infant formula, ‘a2 Platinum.’ It is produced here in New Zealand by Synthecon, and marketed in Australia, New Zealand, and China. With New Zealand, the promotion has been limited, but in Australia it is clearly getting lots of traction . . . there is a flood of new research now being published in the international scientific and medical journals demonstrating the relevance of A1-beta-casein to human health. The underlying cause is that A1 beta-casein digests to a peptide (a protein fragment) which has opioid characteristics. The peptide is called beta-casomorphin-7, or BCM7. This translates to a ‘morphine-like fragment from beta-casein containing seven amino acids’. The effects are multi-faceted and every month more are learning more.
Bad enough that Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack wants to import beef from Foot and Mouth Disease-infected (FMD) nations like Brazil and Argentina. But in reviewing the nations that exported butter to the U.S. in 2014, we find a handful of nations with FMD problems. Somebody in Washington, D.C. is asleep at the switch on this one! In 2014, the U.S. imported butter from the following nations that lack FMD-free status by the World Organization for Animal Health: India, Israel, Egypt, and Bangladesh.

Further, the following nations have FMD regions that do or do not practice vaccination: Colombia, Argentina, Brazil, Turkey, and Philippines. 

Therefore, test half a dozen milk cows – at a total cost of well under $100. Testing a half dozen milk cows should reveal at least one or two A2A2 cows. Some neighbors are finding their own herd’s milk to do the same for your farm. Now is the time to bring your WMP industry back to profitability.

The dairy industry is one angry parent away from a loss of public credibility. If one very upset parent starts asking questions about why their sick baby has such elevated levels of BCM7 in their milk, we ask were BCM7 comes from, goes to the internet, and says, “Oh, no! I drank the wrong milk,” and turns to social media. Look out. Remember what pink slime did to IBP, and BCM7 is its ‘new’ Organic……. Let’s make some changes, so this never happens.

Organic dairy producers in the U.S. deserve commendations, because since the 2007 release of “Devil in the Milk,” organic dairy farmers have been paying attention to A2 and are changing their genetics. There are 35-40 organic dairy farmers in my community, and virtually all know about A2 milk. We still have work to do, but everyone is aware. Last winter, in a conversation with one of the larger conventional dairy farmers in the community, he asked about A2 milk. Answer: “What’s that?”…… along with a confused look.

No “bad case scenarios” of this sort need happen, if the U.S. dairy industry refocuses dairy cattle genetics and works to eliminate the A1 gene from our nation’s dairy herd – all in tandem with a well-coordinated marketing program. If there is no A1 milk, there is no BCM7 in children’s blood. And we never have to hear about it again. The U.S. dairy industry could have a role in improving the overall health and well-being of their consumers … our proclaimed goal, eh?? Let dairy, through A2 milk, become a “farm-acy” for improved human wellness!

The a2 Corporation of New Zealand has announced that it intends to re-enter the U.S. market in 2015. Several years ago, the initial effort in the U.S. bombed. Thus, the advent of commercial A2 sales may be soon. The a2 Corporation of New Zealand owns both the testing technology (a2M) and has intellectual property rights over A2 milk. Whenever and however A2 milk arrives as supermarkets in the U.S., we hope that it’s an opportunity that may be shared a little more often. A2 milk might be the “new Organic” … and if those cows gorge on a lot of grass and pasture … so much the better! More information is available at: www.a2milk.com or www.the2milkcompany.com

I would personally love to see the dairy industry become the farm-acy, helping our family, friends, and neighbors and maybe even the people I don’t like so much.