

Got Milk? We're Working on It!

Chewonki responds to the consequences of food-safety legislation

MEGAN PHILLIPS

Milking is a twice-daily ritual that has always bookended days on the farm. We milk in the barn in winter and out on pasture from late spring through fall; we filter milk at the farm, pasteurize it in the kitchen, and drink cream-topped whole milk from thick-walled glass bottles at meals. In the pre-breakfast hours of late spring 2011, however, farmers and students—hands aching from wresting 35 pounds of milk from Lola's teats—did not filter, pasteurize, or drink Lola's milk. We poured it onto the compost pile. Lola's milk was clean and nutritious, and it represented the epitome of knowing the source of our food. But because of food-safety regulations, our pasteurization system was deemed in need of improvement. As a result, we composted milk for two weeks, dried Lola off at the peak of her milk production, and have been lacking a key system on our production- and education-focused farm for almost a year now. Everyone in the Chewonki community has missed it.

Whether our food comes from a backyard garden, a local farm, or a supermarket, food should feed us, not harm us. Thank goodness that well-intentioned food-safety regulations exist.

However, these regulations do come at a cost sometimes—an economic one that can be prohibitive for small-scale farmers and emotional for teenage semester students forced to compost their hand-milked earnings. While some regulations apply to all farms, others differentiate among farms. Some regulations make distinctions, for example, based on a farm's size; others differentiate between farms that sell directly to consumers and those that sell to restaurants and cafeterias. Here at Chewonki, the connection between farmer and consumer is intimate: we work side by side milking and gardening; we process, prepare, and eat our food together every day. And yet our farm technically "sells" (without an exchange of money) our food to a commercial kitchen serving paying participants, and so we fall under stricter regulations for dairy processing, poultry slaughter, and the like.

Logistically, this means we are in a period of transition at Chewonki, as increased regulations dictate changes in some



longstanding practices. The pigs, which used to help recycle our food waste, cannot legally eat postconsumer food waste unless it is pasteurized. Despite a strong commitment to raising pork, nobody wants to oversee heating up vats of slop, so we are moving our pigs into the woods this year; they will eat a primarily grain-based diet, and we will finish them on wild-collected acorns and apples. We have also given up—with regret at the lost educational opportunity—processing poultry on-site for the time being. Instead, our students will raise and send away 150 broiler chickens for slaughter at a USDA-inspected facility.

And the milk? We hope by this summer to have a high-tech dairy-processing facility in the Wallace Center, fit with a 15-gallon vat that can be used to legally pasteurize milk and make yogurt or cheese. Expanded dairy system, here we come! ■

Farmer Megan Phillips doesn't just grow food for the Chewonki community—she also loves to cook and write about Chewonki-grown food. We're delighted to introduce her new column here, in which she'll explore the links between the farm and kitchen. Thanks to Semester School math teacher Bill Hinkley for coming up with the column's playful title!

In order to start milking at Chewonki again, we must raise \$20,400 to construct a new milking parlor, update our existing milk-filtering room, and build a new dairy-processing facility in the Wallace Center. These new facilities will allow us to expand our dairy system to include two cows, ensuring a year-round milk supply for the Chewonki community and providing increased educational opportunities. Donations to this project would be greatly appreciated. Please contact Lucy Hull in the Development Office for details (lhull@chewonki.org or 207-882-7323, ext. 127).