America’s Largest Organic Dairy Brand Is Not Organic, Study Suggests

Do you really know what’s in your organic milk? According to recent reports, the big organic dairies in the United States may be lying to you. An investigation by the Washington Post into High Plains Dairy in Colorado, owned by Aurora Organic Dairy, found that the farm isn’t complying with organic regulations.

Located in Greeley, Colorado, High Plains Dairy is home to over 15,000 cows, which dwarfs most organic dairy operations by a hundredfold. This dairy behemoth is a major organic milk supplier to national brands like Costco and Walmart, and millions of customers pay twice the price of conventional milk for their dairy products.

A closer look at the dairy farm’s practices has revealed that farm is not organic.

The Issue of Grazing

When it comes to organic milk certification, a key detail is pasture-based grazing. Rather than subsisting on feedlot corn like their conventional cousins, organic dairy cows are required to graze on pasture throughout the growing season. Not only is this more natural for the ruminant stomachs in cows, it changes the chemical composition of their milk to increase the Omega-3 fat content in ways that are more nutritious for humans.

The actual amount of grazing required, however, seems to be subjective. Last year, reporters from the Washington Post visited the High Plains dairy complex eight times and found

little evidence of pasture-based grazing. Though the dairy claimed that their cows were constantly on pasture, reporters never saw more than a few hundred cows (less than 10 percent of the total herd) on pasture at any given time. In contrast, the majority of animals appeared to be in feedlots. In response to these observations, the dairy staff reported that their cows were likely elsewhere at the time of the visits, possibly being milked.

As further evidence against their grazing practices, testing done on milk samples by Virginia Tech found that the fat content in Aurora milk was a better match for conventionally-raised animals than organic ones.

Related: *Stay Away From This Brand of Organic Dairy*

The Costs for Consumers

When it comes to mislabeled milk, consumers are the ones that wind up paying the price. Organic milk usually costs at least double what conventional varieties go for, and skyrocketing sales have turned organics into a $40 billion industry in the United States. However, customers only pay this price because they believe they are getting a superior product in return, so unscrupulous labeling practices only work to discredit the entire organic industry.

The Problem with Big Organic

This kind of controversy for Aurora Organic Dairy is hardly new. The Cornucopia Institute, a strong campaigner for better organic practices, has created lawsuits against the company for close to a decade. In 2011, Aurora committed to improving its organic practices, though the evidence is scarce that many changes were made.

Recommended: *Galactagogues Foods, Herbs, and other Ways to Increase Breastmilk Production*

Aurora Organic Farms is already the leading organic dairy in America, and it's only continuing to expand. The refusal of mega farms to fully comply with organic standards also has damaging effects on small organic farms that follow the rules. Because organically grazing dairy cattle costs more, small farms get pinched out of their market share when their competition doesn't follow the rules. This means that the growth of mega-dairies that cut corners to produce cheaper "organic" milk is crushing smaller dairies and forcing them out of business.

The Takeaway for Consumers: Keeping Farms Accountable

If drinking organic milk is a priority for you, do the industry a favor and seek out the farms that truly follow the rules. As half of the organic milk sold in the United States comes from large factory farms, it's more important than ever to seek out statistics about each farm to ensure they are living up to organic principles.

It's time to demand greater regulation and better accountability from our farmers so that we can truly trust what we see on our food labels.

Recommended Reading:

- *Homemade, Vegan Nut Milk Recipes and More*
- *Why You Should Avoid Pasteurized Cow's Milk*
- *How to Optimize Curcumin Absorption – With Golden Milk Tea Recipe*
- *Candida, Gut Flora, Allergies, and Disease*

Sources:

- *The Largest Organic Dairy in America Might Not Be*

Organic – Grist

- *Why your ‘organic’ milk may not be organic* – The Washington Post
- Aurora Organic Dairy
- *Your Organic Milk Might Not be as Pure as You Think* – The Consumerist