



Raw
Milk
Producers
Association

newsletter

Chair's Report

I hope everyone had a successful and profitable Christmas. It's great to hear so many positive stories of successful diversification projects, not just in raw milk but all the other produce being made on farms by our membership.

I am delighted to announce that the RMPA is now able to offer a service to all members, providing help and advice on microbiological issues in on-farm production. This new service will be offered by Paul Thomas of the Specialist Cheesemakers Association technical committee. Please see the back page for further information.

In other news, the RMPA committee will now be holding regular 6-monthly meetings with the Food Standards Agency to discuss all things raw milk. These meetings are designed to allow us an ongoing two-way conversation with the FSA. We will have the benefit of understanding the bigger picture about the types of issues that Dairy Hygiene Inspectors are coming across on their inspections, as well as for the RMPA committee to give feedback to the FSA on behalf of our producer members. We had our first very productive meeting in December. One of the most interesting figures that came out of this meeting was that the hygiene indicator results coming back from on-farm testing amongst members are improving. We have been seeing a decrease in test fails over the last year from 21% to 19%. I think decrease this shows the dedication that our members have been putting into understanding and mastering the hygiene controls on their farms. It would be amazing if we could knock another couple of % in the next year as all improvements will help in our ultimate goal, to change raw milk's Route of Sales regulations (schedule 6).

I hope you enjoy the winter edition of the newsletter, hopefully near a nice warm fire with a cup of tea in hand!

Jonny Crickmore



INSIDE THIS ISSUE



To Test Or Not To Test



Morwick Dairy

4

On-farm customer safety

6

New RMPA service for help when you need it most

8

To Test Or Not To Test

This is such a difficult question for producers. Nobody wants to spend a fortune on testing if they don't need to but equally, it's great to have the peace of mind that comes from knowing you have a history of consistent micro results to prove that your systems and Food Safety Management Plan are working.

by Jonny Crickmore and Bronwen Percival

For us at Fen Farm Dairy, we have found an approach that works for us, as advised by several microbiological consultants over the years. The overwhelming advice of consultants has been to create a regular testing schedule and stick to it. BUT... along the way, be prepared to increase it if:

- A. You have an undesirable result.
- B. The weather and the environment around you has changed in a way that could favour pathogen growth or make contamination more likely (i.e. cold wet conditions/mud/dry and dusty etc.)
- C. New members of staff have just joined your company.

In these periods, we increase the frequency of testing temporarily, until we were comfortable that we have found and addressed the cause of the bad test result or the new norm has returned with the environment and the new staff member. Once we have a string of consistent results proving that our methods are working, we can reduce the testing frequency back down to the original level on our testing schedule.

If you feel that you keep testing

and nothing concerning ever shows up on your results, you may find yourself considering reducing your testing frequency. This is completely reasonable but I would be careful about how you assess it. It's a good idea to set a date in the diary once a year for an annual review of your testing schedule. I wouldn't review it just after you paid the lab fee, nor would I review it because your DHI has just been and you passed! When the time is ready to review, it's a good idea to ask yourself the same questions about each test you undertake:

- » *Have I ever had a result on my premises where this pathogen came up in the test or have I ever failed this hygiene test?*
- » *Is this pathogen common for the industry I'm in?*
- » *Could I be confident by removing this test from my schedule or reducing its frequency that it wouldn't compromise the safety/consumer trust in my products and risk damaging the reputation of my business?*

So, in essence, reducing your testing schedule could be the right thing for you but only if you feel you can

answer each of these questions with confidence. Every farm is different and has a different set of risk factors, so get to know your own and don't be swayed by the testing schedule of a friend or neighbour.

Another important thing to consider is any new product you are planning to launch. It will be vital that you employ a belt-and-braces approach to testing a new product in the early days, to get a clear picture of how it behaves at a micro level and any seasonal or hygiene factors that could put your product at risk. Even if you are making a new product using the same old equipment, differing acidity and compositional factors in the new product could mean that it has different risk-factors for pathogens, compared to existing products you make on the same equipment. Over time, you will notice any unusual patterns in your test results and be able to react quickly to remedy any concerns. Once you start to build confidence that your methods are keeping your products safe, then it's a good time to create a permanent testing schedule for your new product, to bring it into line with your other products.

Below is a list of points to consider, from Bronwen Percival of Neals Yard

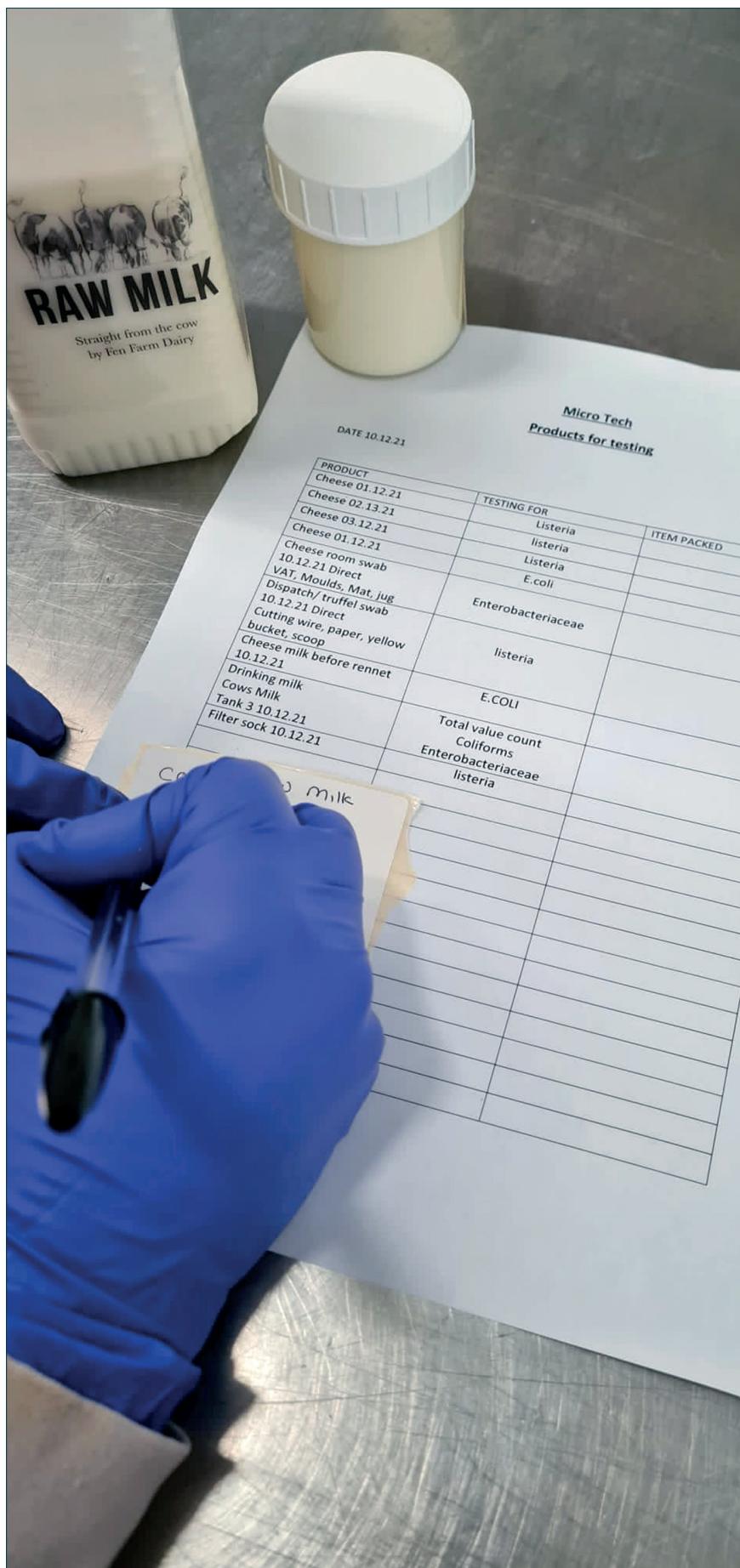
Raw Milk Producers Association

Dairy and the Specialist Cheesemakers Association technical committee:

- » Testing is a means of verification that hygiene and animal health controls are working properly, not of keeping products safe.
- » The frequency of testing needs to be based on a producer's own assessment of the risk and the extent to which systems are under control.
- » Changes to the system should prompt producers to consider whether a period of increased testing is necessary, to confirm that everything is working as it should be.
- » If a producer has had a string of 'good' test results, it suggests that the system is working properly, but this does not mean it's OK to stop testing.
- » The choice of how frequently to test has everything to do with the risk factors of a given system, in order to flag things that aren't under control as quickly as possible so they can be put right, for example:

- * Number of animals.
- * Newness of milking staff.
- * Season of the year (is it wet/rainy? Are animals coming in dirtier than normal?)
- * Age of milking and processing equipment.

- » If you decide to decrease your testing frequency, or to test for different things, it's important to write a short, dated statement explaining the rationale for doing so. A string of clear test results isn't enough – better to focus on the elements of the system that are well-controlled as evidence that a reduced frequency of verification is required.





Morwick Dairy

WE SPOKE TO THE FAMILY-RUN MORWICK DAIRY, TO HEAR ABOUT THEIR RECENT GROWTH AND SUCCESSES WITH RAW MILK VENDING MACHINES.

Farm Facts

Farm type:	Mixed, Dairy & Arable
Farm size:	950 acres in total, 300 acres dairy grazing
Employees:	3
Tenure:	Northumberland estates – 3 Generations
County/region:	Northumberland
Soil type:	Medium low
Key Farming Practices:	Strip grazing
Breed:	Ayrshires, Holsteins and Jerseys
Milking herd:	200
Followers:	200
Avrg yld/cow/goat/sheep:	9,000L
Total annual production	1.8 Million
Annual sales of RDM:	10,000L
Milk selling price:	£1 per litre
Dairy products sold:	Raw milk, Ice Cream



Raw Milk Producers Association

Our family has farmed at Morwick since 1945 and we have a strong tradition of farming spanning six generations. Currently three generations work alongside on the farm daily. In 2002 our girl Sand queen, also our logo, won Supreme Dairy Champion at both The Royal Highland and Royal Show. At Edinburgh she was also awarded the Queen's Cup, fitting for a Queen herself!

In 2006 we introduced two Jersey cows into the herd and today we are milking twelve. One of our bestselling ice creams is our plain 'fior di latte' Jersey ice cream which we collect separately.

Michael (dad) and Peter (son) run the arable and dairy side, with help from David (Grandpa, 93) of the business whilst Angie (mum) and Ben (son) run the ice cream.

This achievement sparked ideas of diversification for the farm and the following year we opened our ice cream parlour on the farm. Over the years the popularity of ice cream has only grown, and we have built a strong reputation along with numerous awards including Great Taste. We make our ice cream to a traditional Italian recipe, where our milk is the major ingredient and shines through in the final product. Using batch process we have a repertoire of well over 200 flavours from classics to more eccentric flavours such as porter ice cream, avocado, and recently earl grey.

We began selling raw milk in 2015, we would often get requests from customers if they could buy the milk as they can see the cows on the farm and more often than not our milk trolley, which we use to transport the milk from the milking parlour to the ice cream parlour. Initially we pre-bottled raw milk to be sold in our shop and moved to a DF Italia Mod 200 at the start of 2020. Initially sales slowly rose but during the first covid lockdown the machine became extremely popular and has led to many retained customers.

We use a prefoam dip on all cows and they are all wiped clean with individual sheets of green paper per cow. Some cows will be dipped and wiped multiple times until they are clean as possible. This is often the case due to all cows being housed in a loose straw bedding system. All milking cows are well bedded twice a day as well as disinfecting with a knapsack sprayer



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twice a week and regularly mucking out. Once milked we use udder gold as a post dip. Our current scc is 110 and Bactoscan is 12, which we're very happy with due to our system.

All milk for raw milk is taken from the tank at the end of milking. All quarters from each cow are drawn out multiple times before the cluster goes on. If the milk isn't good enough it simply won't go in the tank.

Our cows are always bred for type, components along with longevity at present, butterfat 4.7, protein 3.7.

We began selling raw milk as there was a demand for it. At the beginning we had to explain what raw milk is. Some customers believed they had to 'cook' it at home before consumption but we advise all our customers to do their own research on raw milk and decide if it is suitable for themselves.

Our best marketing is word of mouth, if you have a good product customers will pass this on. For the ice cream we can show the 'cow to cone' process and with the milk we can show the 'grass to glass'.

We tell our customers to try the milk and once they have, they are usually hooked!

Our raw milk is sold through a DF Italia Mod 200 vending machine. A large proportion of our raw milk is sold to customers in bulk. Lots of our customers will buy 20-50 litres at one time and freeze the milk, we bottle this by hand.

We sell our glass bottles through a separate vending machine which allows clean bottles to be kept clean. We sell our bottles to our customers, and it is their responsibility to ensure the bottle is clean before refilling. Initially we had an honesty box for the glass bottles however a minority would swap dirty bottles for clean bottles but the second vending machine stopped this. We also sell plastic bottles for 10p.

We fill our vending machine every other day, this is in line with the collection from Arla from our bulk tank. We do this so the milk we are selling is only from one morning's milking.

Any surplus milk we pasteurise and make into ice cream. This ensures the milk we are selling is fresh and no older than 36 hours old, to which we add a 5-day shelf life

On-farm customer safety

One of the most rewarding things about selling raw milk, or any product direct to the consumer, is the ability to have contact and conversations with them, the chance to build a relationship, and of course, the chance to show off your farm.

by **Rebecca Mayhew**

Seeing a real farm “in action” is one of the main reasons that our customers seek us out – it’s a real tangible desire to understand where food comes from, to support an actual food producer (not a large corporation), and to buy truly nutritious food.

With the privilege of being open to the public, there are pitfalls that we must be aware of and safeguard against. As food business operators, we ourselves are incredibly vigilant in terms of our own hygiene and the cleanliness of our product. What we also need to ensure is that our customers take the same level of care with themselves when they visit our farms. By protecting our customers, we are also protecting our own businesses and livelihoods.

Since the pandemic struck last March, we have seen hand sanitising stations pop up everywhere like unwelcome weeds. The fact of the matter is though, that if we are inviting people onto our farms, and giving them the opportunity to see and possibly touch our animals (or even just a gate or fence), we need to be offering the ability to use a hand wash station. Hand sanitiser, when it comes to germs such as E-Coli 157, STEC, Listeria, and all the other nasties lurking around our farmyards, just won’t cut the mustard.



The fact of the matter is though, that if we are inviting people onto our farms, and giving them the opportunity to see and possibly touch our animals (or even just a gate or fence), we need to be offering the ability to use a hand wash station.

The crux of the problem is that even if your raw milk is cleaner than clean, any EHO presented with a member of the raw milk drinking public with food poisoning (even if they've had a dodgy curry), will always blame the raw milk, and it'll be a case of shoot first and ask questions later. Guilty until proven innocent, the effect on your business may be profound, even if your historic monthly testing results are squeaky clean.

So, what's the best way to protect your customers from themselves?

1. Undertake a full risk assessment of the approach to your raw milk sale operation and the immediate surroundings.
2. If you allow access to animals in whatever shape or form, consider double fencing to eliminate physical contact.
3. If you do not wish to eliminate the possibility of physical contact with your animals, then sufficient signage should be introduced to thoroughly explain the risks of animal contact and transferable pathogens.



4. Taking into account the steps above, consider the installation of a hand wash station, and ensure that there is adequate signage advising visitors to wash their hands – this need not be a hugely expensive installation – water does not have to be hot although this is preferable to encourage longer hand washing times.
5. Ensure that the approach to your shop/vending shed is always kept clean – perhaps implement a regular cleaning schedule for concreted areas and gates that are within the public domain.
6. Write everything down! Know your target audience – EHO's love a good paper trail but keep it realistic.
7. If you're going to employ a consultant to help with your risk assessment, do shop around – prices and advice vary hugely – the most important thing is to keep your assessment thorough, simple, and workable.

Further information to help with all of these matters can be found on the HSE website, and on the National Farm Attractions Network (www.farmattractions.net) there is a particularly good risk assessment in the FEN code of practice that can be tailored to your needs.

New RMPA service for help when you need it most

We are very pleased to announce we have engaged Paul Thomas to help us support our members in times of need. Paul has an extensive background in raw milk cheesemaking, sits on the technical committee for Specialist Cheesemakers Association and was a contributing author of the FACE guidelines for raw dairy products. He is highly knowledgeable about raw milk microbiology and regulations, and is experienced in supporting producers with technical issues.

Since RMPA was established 2.5 years ago, our co-operative has facilitated a network of peer-to-peer exchange of ideas and advice, and many members have been making good use of this resource. However, for the really sticky situations, any member is able to contact us for help and advice in dealing with microbiological or hygiene issues and receive up to a maximum of 2 hours of Paul's time, which is included in your membership fee.

If you find yourself in need of support, please contact info@rawmilkproducers.co.uk and copy in secretary@rawmilkproducers.co.uk

Other RMPA services and activities

Please do check regularly in the members area of the website, where you can find a range of resources for raw milk producers, digital copies of newsletters and minutes of committee meetings.

We continue to represent our members interests in regular meetings with the Food Standards Agency. Most recently we have been reviewing any issues arising with the implementation of the new controls and inspections, STEC testing and the regulations on sales routes in Schedule 6. These meetings continue to be constructive and productive.

Many consumers looking for raw milk visit our 'where to buy' map on our website. You can update your listing and send us photos by emailing us at info@rawmilkproducers.co.uk. Members can use our 'RMPA Member' logo on your website and promotional materials, and please do link back to rawmilkproducers.co.uk from your website as it helps raise the search engine rankings of both sites.

Farm visits and training days have provided great opportunities to meet other producers and learn and, conditions allowing, we would like to organise more of these. If you would be interested in hosting a visit or would like to be profiled in our newsletter please let us know.

The forum is an excellent place to connect with other raw milk producers. Many of us face similar challenges so it's always worth asking there how others are dealing with them.

If you have any ideas for RMPA, suggestions for the next newsletter or are facing difficulties, please don't hesitate to get in touch.

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