

## Jersey Milk from “Moo to You”

Attracting visitors from upwards of 50 miles away, one of the newest agritourism attractions in South Carolina is changing the way consumers receive farm-fresh, homegrown products. Bush River Jerseys, Newberry, S.C., and Peeler's Dairy, Gaffney, S.C., have joined forces to market All-Jersey® milk in Vend-A-Moos across South Carolina.

With the emerging trend of value-added products being offered to consumers, Rick Doran, owner of Bush River Jerseys, saw a need and opportunity to create a niche product on his Registered Jersey™ farm.

“Our goal was to provide a fresher, quality product straight from the cow to the consumer and offer it at a competitive price for both the consumer and the producer,” said Doran.

Beginning in September 2004, Doran teamed with long-time Jersey breeder and milk processor, Harvey Peeler, to begin

bottling and merchandising All-Jersey® milk. Currently, Bush River Jerseys is the only farm in the United States licensed to use the All-Jersey® label.

“Our love of the Jersey cow and the belief in the quality she delivers combined with our marketing will hopefully work together to promote the label and the product,” said Doran.

Choosing to bottle their milk under the All-Jersey® label was an obvious decision for both Doran and Peeler, who both grew up with

the Jersey cow and have been involved with the American Jersey Cattle Association for many years. Several dairies, including Peeler's, also had sold All-Jersey® milk in the past and had already established a name with consumers.

“The All-Jersey® label has a great

reputation in the Carolinas,” said Peeler. “It was a win-win situation for us to use the label with our product.”

To Peeler, however, the challenge of creating a successful business was offering something the public would grab a hold of. Having grown up with home delivery of milk, he created gallon milk vending machines, or Vend-A-Moos, that would allow consumers to access fresh, quality milk at any time of the day and at their convenience.

“The Vend-A-Moo is the next best thing to home delivery,” said Peeler. “It is fast, fresh, cold and convenient. Parents do not have to leave the car to pick up their milk and kids love hearing the machine ‘moo’ at them.”

People who visit the Vend-A-Moo at Bush River also have the added knowledge of seeing exactly where their milk is being processed. Upon driving to the farm, visitors may pass heifer and cow lots and see the Jerseys that are producing this

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superior product.

Currently, five products are produced from Bush River's Jerseys – gallons of whole milk, 2% milk and skim milk, pints of chocolate milk and gallons and bulk cream. Currently, they are selling 35,000 gallons of milk a month at four different Vend-A-Moo locations – one at Bush River Jerseys and three around Gaffney, S.C., 50 miles from Newberry. This is an increase from when they first began marketing their All-Jersey® milk, and both Doran and Peeler agree that they will continue to increase their supply when the demand calls for it.

### From the Cow to You

Beginning in Bush River's new 24-slab rotary parlor, the majority of the milk is pumped directly into the processing plant, where milk is processed three times a week. In order to keep their start-up costs low, the old parlor and milk house were converted into a new processing plant, just feet from the current parlor. They also purchased previously-used storage tanks, a pasteurizer and a homogenizer.

Once in the storage tanks, milk is cooled to 38° Fahrenheit and then pasteurized using the high temperature/short time method. Milk flows between metal plates that are heated on the outside by hot water to 161° F for 15-20 seconds. It is very important that all the milk is exposed to the same temperature for the same amount of time, thus eliminating all harmful microorganisms in the milk. All batches are also tested for component levels and drug residues to ensure that the milk is safe for human consumption.

Once pasteurized, the milk that will be used for whole milk is homogenized. Homogenization is the process of breaking up the fat in milk into smaller molecules so that it no longer separates from the milk. Milk that is used for skim has all the cream removed and the 2% milk is a blend of whole and skim milk together. The plastic gallon jugs are automatically filled, labeled and washed and then placed in crates and refrigerated.

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The number two tourist attraction in 2005—the Vend-A-Moo. Milk is distributed in gallons from the Vend-A-Moo. The machine located at Bush River Jerseys is filled three to four times a week ensuring consumers receive the freshest milk available.

The key to the success of the Vend-A-Moo is the guarantee of freshness that consumers expect. Once the milk is bottled, it is placed in the vending machine on the farm within a few hours; the three other machines are filled within 24-hours and milk is never on the shelf longer than three days.

### Marketing and Business Strategies

One of the strongest pieces of advice Doran has given to any producer considering creating their own niche market is one of precaution.

“Make sure you have a strong market to sell your product first. You can bottle all the milk you want, but without someone

to buy it, you will not have a profitable business.”

Once a market is established, finding partners and employees is crucial to the operation. Doran suggests finding someone who can run the processing plant and understands quality control, while also employing someone who understands the marketing side of the business. Currently, the plant is run by a manager with several other employees and Peeler handles all marketing of the products.

Peeler's marketing skills have paid off. The Vend-A-Moo has gained attention from a variety of sources, including local and state newspapers, and radio and television stations. It has even been heard mooing on radio, gaining even more attraction for the product.

In 2005, the Vend-A-Moo was voted the number two most popular new tourist attraction in South Carolina. People have come from across the Carolinas to visit the vending machine and return because of the premium Jersey product.

“Our hope is that the novelty of the Vend-A-Moo draws visitors in, but the farm-fresh, superior product is what keeps them coming back,” said Doran.

And people are returning to the Vend-A-Moos week after week. There are even communities and neighborhoods 60 miles from Newberry that send one person each week to purchase milk for the whole group.



All milk bottled from Bush River Jerseys is marketed under the All-Jersey® label. The label carries with it a reputation of quality and freshness that consumers value.

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## **Bush River—From Moo to You**

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Commitments from groups like these are just one sign that the Vend-A-Moo is already a success. Another assurance to both Doran and Peeler are hearing the comments from consumers about the differences in the taste of the milk from the Vend-A-Moo versus that of store-bought milk.

“We have people tell us that our milk, even the skim milk, has so much more flavor than other milk,” said Peeler. “The reason is because of the Jersey cow and the fact that there are more solids-non-fat, protein, calcium and lactose in her milk compared to other breeds.”

The herd at Bush River has been producing quality-Jersey milk since 1972, when Dr. J. J. Malnati first moved from New England to South Carolina. At that time, South Carolina was in an all-Jersey milk market, and “Doc” saw opportunities for all-Jersey products in the south. Home to 400 Jerseys today, the herd is now managed by Malnati’s grandson, Doran.

The Bush River 2006 AJCA Lactation Average on 263 records was 18,653 lbs. milk, 907 lbs. fat and 663 lbs. protein. That calculates to be a 4.8% fat test and 3.6% protein test.

To Bush River, this new enterprise solidifies their future in the dairy industry. Doran’s son, R.J., a junior in high school, has already taken an active role on the farm and is interested in a future at Bush River. Peeler’s sons, Smith and Boone, assist with Peeler’s Dairy and are looking forward to a future with Vend-A-Moos.

### **Continuing to Offer the Best Product**

Doran and Peeler know that the continued success of the Vend-A-Moo is their dedicated commitment to the consumer. Offering a premium Jersey product is what consumers have demanded. Today, more and more people are questioning the origins of their food, and the Vend-A-Moos answer those questions.

Home-grown, farm-fresh products are not a fad. If anything, they are becoming the trend in today’s society. Dairy producers across the country are recognizing and answering the plea from consumers to offer quality products, and many are reaping the benefits of these products.

A new generation of consumer is emerging, and all-Jersey products will only continue to provide a superior Jersey alternative for these consumers. But as both Doran and Peeler warn, make sure you have a market for that all-Jersey product and the profits will follow.