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# Dairyman Claims Diet Keeps Cows Happy, Makes Best Milk

By Margaret Koch

A bunch of happy cows that live in Happy Valley have walked away with top raw milk honors for the past two years.

Why?

Because they are happy with their bovine diet, according to Joe Sigrist, Grade A dairyman at 3443 Branciforte drive. Sigrist has two trophies on the mantle in his home. To win them he has competed with nearly 70 Grade A dairies from Santa Cruz county to the King City area.

The milk is tested throughout the year for flavor, sediment, fat and solid non-fat content, and for bacteria count. A milk inspector from the local county health department calls once a week to collect a sample—Sigrist never knows when he is coming. Once each year all the weekly scores are tallied and compared and the winner is announced.

Competition is tough because dairy men today are an alert and well-informed lot about the best and most efficient methods and equipment.

Sigrist claims that the "secret" of his success as a two-time winner—if you can call it a secret—is in the hay he buys for his cows.

"If alfalfa is cut too late its stems are tough—the cows are fussy and don't want to eat it," he explained.

Before Sigrist will accept a load of alfalfa hay he examines it and breaks a few stems between his fingers and he can tell. Flavor—the quality that sends kids back for seconds—is dependent on the quality of the feed, he says.

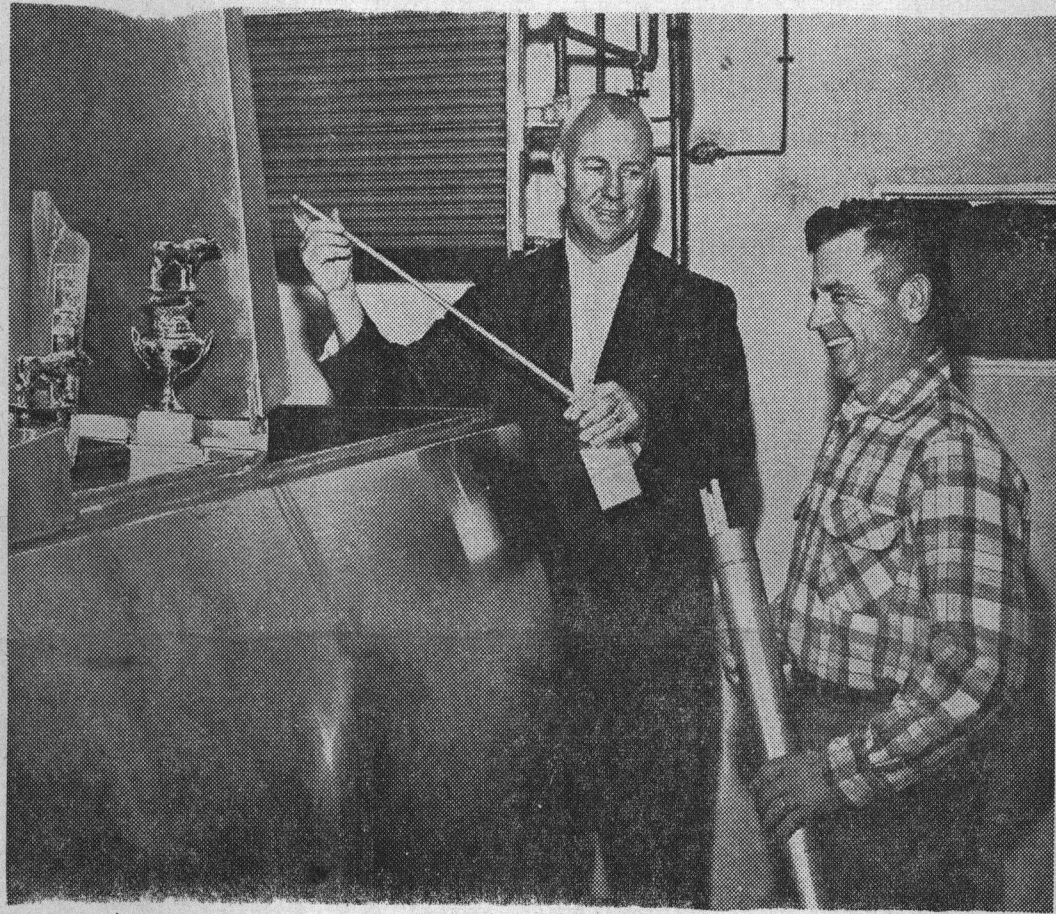
Then of course there is the never-ending battle against the bacteria count-down. The 60 black and white Holstein cows get four "baths" per day apiece. That adds up to a total of 240 baths—which would be impossible without mechanical ingenuity. Because Sigrist runs the dairy all by himself, milking the 60 cows twice a day without help.

"It's all a push-button operation," he said.

The cows are "showered" automatically as they enter the big cement-floored barn. They wait their turn to enter the "milking parlor" five at a time. Here their udders are washed again with warm water and disinfectant. The prize-winning milk is drawn off by automatic milkers through stainless steel pipes to a cooling system, then into a 555-gallon stainless steel holding tank. A milk tank truck calls every other day to take the milk to Watsonville where it is processed by Meadow Gold. No milk is sold at the dairy.

Each cow munches about eight pounds of grain while she is being milked. She also consumes about 35 pounds of alfalfa per day. But the cows are not allowed to eat for four hours before each milking time. And here is

## Will It Be Another Winner?



another factor important to the taste of the milk, Sigrist pointed out.

The herd also seats its "salad" from the ranch pasture which is irrigated during the summer months.

Sigrist, who was brought up on the Eastside Dairy which was operated by his family for years, can milk about 30 cows per hour. Between milking chores there are cement floors to be washed down,

the stainless piping system to be sterilized, feed to be bought and new calves to be raised as future members of the prize-winning herd. It's a busy one-man operation but Sigrist doesn't treat his cows like machines.

"You have to be gentle with them," he said.

His "formula" for prize-winning raw milk: absolute cleanliness, good cows, and above all—good feed for them.

Will he win again this year? Joe Sigrist (right), owner of Happy Valley Grade A dairy, watches as Milk Inspector Francis Gardner of the Santa Cruz county health department takes a sample of milk. Sigrist's 60-cow dairy has won top place in the producers' raw milk judging contest for the past two years.

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