

South County dairy farmer Ron Garthwaite and his wife, Collette Cassidy, are re-creating 'the glory days of California dairy' using time-honored methods.

# Milk ... like it used to taste



One of the quality inspectors at Claravale Farm gives a batch of raw milk the once over. Raw milk backers argue pasteurization kills beneficial bacteria. Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel photos

## Claravale Farm milk goes straight from cow to bottle to consumer



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County Bounty

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**M**ilk and American childhood go together like, well, cookies and milk. When I was a kid, milk meant giggly milk mustaches enjoyed with my siblings after slurping my father's famous malted milkshakes. Little did I know, that milk had probably traveled for weeks from cow to processor to distributor to store before landing in the blender of my family's suburban New Jersey kitchen. Thirty-five years later, do I even know what real milk tastes like?

On a recent spring morning, I decided to find out. Just minutes from the rush of downtown Watsonville, off a quiet one-lane road, I found Claravale Farm. Half-a-dozen sweet brown calves cavorted in the sun while their mothers ambled over for a scratch behind the ears, their warm breath puffing on my outstretched hand. Here Ron Garthwaite and his wife, Collette Cassidy, are re-creating "the glory days of California dairy" using old-fashioned, time-honored methods to



provide their customers with fresh, natural, raw milk.

At Claravale, you won't find the black & white Holsteins whose milk is commonly sold in supermarkets. "We have only Jersey cows," Garthwaite says. "They produce the highest quality milk with higher concentrations of proteins, solids, butterfat and beta-carotene than other breeds."

These animals are clearly treated with dignity and respect, enjoying organic feed, fresh air and plenty of room to stretch their legs. The folks at Claravale

Ron Garthwaite of Claravale Farms greets one of the newest members of the farm's herd Saturday.

don't use hormones to increase milk production nor do they indiscriminately use antibiotics.

It's the way Claravale has been operating since 1927, when owner Ken Peake started off with a single cow. Almost 80 years later, Claravale maintains about 50 cows on two sites, a size that allows Garthwaite to control every step of the process. Because raw milk is completely unprocessed, it goes from the cow to the bottle to the consumer. Most commercial milk is pasteurized (cooked to kill bacteria) and homogenized (processed so the cream won't rise to the top). Many brands also are adulterated with synthetic vitamins and other additives.

Proponents of raw milk argue that pasteurization kills the beneficial

### Know milk?

Info courtesy of Purina Mills:

- It takes 12 pounds of whole milk to make one gallon of ice cream.
- It takes 21.2 pounds of whole milk to make one pound of butter.
- It takes 10 pounds of milk to make one pound of cheese.
- Cows have an acute sense of smell — they can smell something up to 6 miles away.
- The natural yellow color of butter comes mainly from beta-carotene found in the grass the cows graze on.
- An average dairy cow weighs about 1,400 pounds.
- Most cows chew at least 50 times per minute.
- There are approximately 340-350 squirts in a gallon of milk.





Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Collette Cassidy pours a glass of the good stuff at Claravale Farms outside Watsonville.

## Milk

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bacteria that naturally crowd out the bad. They claim that pasteurization destroys valuable nutrients, vitamins and enzymes while altering milk's true flavor. Opponents counter that pasteurization kills common pathogens transmitted by milk that could make consumers sick.

"There are many benefits to raw milk," asserts Laura Segelman, a nutrition educator based in Santa Cruz. "It contains all of the natural enzymes and antioxidants that nature intended. Of course, pasteurization does kill some of the bad things that can potentially cause harm and you need to be mindful of that risk. However, those problems are more likely to come up in a large, factory farming situation where there's not as much care and attention given to the cows and their lifestyle. A senior or somebody with a compromised immune system should certainly be careful, just as you would with anything you put in your body."

Another primary purpose of pasteurization is to increase milk's shelf life by reducing the number of spoilage-causing organisms. This wasn't an issue when small dairy farms were the norm.

"At the turn of the century, there were more than 200 dairies in Santa Cruz County alone," Cassidy explains. "These were small, neighborhood dairies where the product went from the cow to the table in hours if not days." But after World War I, large dairy firms took over. They consolidated their herds far from most consumers, making extended shelf-life critical.

"We're a couple of generations away from most people having real milk," Garthwaite says. "They don't know what it tastes like. We do dairy the way we think it should be done and let our customers know what that means."

For chef Nicci Tripp of Theo's restaurant it means a "creamy, yummy" product that "tastes like milk is supposed to taste." Tripp, who uses Claravale milk to make fresh mozzarella, Brie and blue cheese says, "You're able to taste the natural flora in the milk — the hay, fresh grass and grain. The flavor changes with the seasons depending on the majority of the animals' diet."

## Where to Buy

You can find Claravale milk locally at New Leaf, Staff of Life and Aptos Natural Foods. To learn more, visit [www.claravaledairy.com](http://www.claravaledairy.com) or call 722-7779.

You can't get that in store-bought milk that's been all beat up."

Of course, there's a cost to doing dairy this way, both for the farmer and the consumer. The bucolic beauty of Claravale Farm masks the tough realities facing many small agribusinesses. Hoping to consolidate their operation on one site, Garthwaite and Cassidy are trying to build a new milking parlor. However, the tortuous county permit process threatens their financial viability, they say, even in the absence of any particularly complicated issues. "It's bureaucracy," Garthwaite says, shaking his head. "Just paper pushing."

His words come back to me as I stand at the dairy case of New Leaf Community Market on 41st Avenue. A quart of Claravale milk sells for \$4.49 plus \$1.25 deposit for the environment-friendly glass bottle.

Remembering the happy, healthy Claravale cows, I overcome my initial sticker shock and purchase two quarts.

I enjoy the weight and heft of the smooth bottle, showcasing the creamy beige liquid within. One sip confirms this isn't the watery, blue-white fluid I'm used to drinking. Claravale milk has a rich, complex flavor, sweet and layered with grassy undertones. It would be scrumptious over fresh raspberries or drizzled over Irish oatmeal with honey. The milk is so good that I'd almost hate to waste it in a malted milkshake.

Flavor aside, I decide that it's worth the cost to know how my milk began, where the cows live and what they ate for breakfast. Having met Garthwaite and Cassidy, I understand the time, energy and personal sacrifice that have gone into providing this simple, honest drink.

"Ron has a true philosophy that I share," Nicci Tripp concludes. "He takes really good care of his animals and his land, and it shows in the final product."

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