

Milk magic

As today's consumer demand a growing variety of dairy products, modern dairies need to focus on development of new products to keep up. How innovative dairy product development is enriching the consumer experience.

Six o'clock at the airport. I could really use a coffee. Half-asleep mumbling: "Coffee with milk, please."

"Sure thing; would you like a Latte, Cappuccino, Americano, Macchiato, Flat White? Whole milk, skim or fat free? Small, medium, large?"

Gone are the days when a cup of coffee was just...well coffee. Coffee has become a true passion worldwide and milk is becoming ever more essential to the experience – even for early birds like me catching the morning flight.

Coffee diversity equals opportunity

Milk is extending the coffee selection and the choices for the modern consumer of dairy products are steadily growing. For dairies, this development offers the opportunity to expand portfolios. Just one example is the dairy company Arla Foods partnership with Starbucks to produce, distribute and market dairy-based coffee across Europe, Middle East and Africa.

With an export of 80% across the globe, Arla Foods knows how to develop new products and is familiar with the fact that the key to innovation is knowledge of what consumers want – even before they know it themselves.

No innovation, no export

It is an approach shared by others in the dairy industry. Steen Nørgaard Madsen and his family run a farm of 190 Jersey cows in Voel in Mid-Jutland. He is chairman of the Danish Dairy Board and says: “Without innovation there would be no export.”

“The development of new products is paramount to be able to sell the amount of dairy products worldwide as Danish dairies do.”

According to the chairman, Danish dairies experienced stagnation for many years when terms like efficiency, logistics, uniformity and quality defined innovation. Now the industry is moving together with the consumers, giving a new dynamic. “The demand changes continuously, and dairy companies who can predict consumer behavior in six months will have a distinct advantage in the market place,” says Steen Nørgaard Madsen. “Today, everybody in the business is asking themselves to whom and where they can sell their products next week – and even next year.”



Naturmælk

The potential of quality commodities

Hanne Harbo, Strategic Food Planner and Partner in the innovation and communications agency Nørgaard Mikkelsen has followed the industry for over 30 years.



Hanne Harbo.

“Danish dairies have been late bloomers, but they have caught up with other European dairies gastronomy wise – and the potential is great,” she says.

“Traditionally, French and Italian cheese have been regarded as gourmet, but Denmark now competes with a solid portfolio of quality cheeses; for example the Unika series from Arla Foods as well as new products from small Danish dairies.”

The trend in celebrating quality commodities is at the heart of the New Nordic kitchen, which has brought fame and Michelin stars to several Danish restaurants.

The ultimate barista milk

A top dairy supplier to the chefs and baristas of the super cool Nordic kitchens is the little organic dairy company Naturmælk located in grassy Southern Jutland near the Danish-German border. The company that has just celebrated its 25th jubilee is owned by 45 dairy farmers who also deliver the milk for the dairy.

Innovation is at the core of Naturmælk that invites chefs and baristas to be part of the development of new products and to constantly challenge the dairy company to stay at the top of their game.



Leif Friis Jørgensen.

“A couple of baristas asked to me develop the ultimate barista milk with a stable and optimal foam that could help them become world champions within their field. It was a challenge we could not turn down,” says Leif Friis Jørgensen, Dairy Manager of Naturmælk.

In practice, Leif Friis Jørgensen and his employees tested different types of milk together with the baristas – including milk from different herds. Various experiments with, among other things, assessing the durability of coffee foam led to the development of a barista milk based on milk from a biodynamic farm that gives a great and stable foaming ability.

The World’s best butter

Naturmælk supplies a range of products to the entire restaurant/catering industry. Leif Friis Jørgensen has collaborated with top chefs to develop many new cheese types along with “Jomfrusmør” (virgin butter), where the final crushing is completed in the restaurant kitchen.

One of these products is the “Hø” or ‘hay’ cheese. The taste of this full-bodied cheese with herbs reminds of summer meadows. It was part of the menu when the Danish chef Rasmus Kofoed was awarded the World’s best at the Bocuse d’Or in Lyon.

Milk creates added value

According to Leif Friis Jørgensen this is what it is all about; to create added value from the milk to benefit everyone.

“I constantly touch base with the chefs. They might ask me to make small packs of biodynamic butter for use in their restaurants or to develop a special cheese for their menu. It is key that we succeed to meet the needs of our partners and thereby the consumers,” he says, adding: “It is not possible to make money by just producing food commodities and feed the World anymore. Regular food is regarded as low status today and we need to do something to fix that.”

Hood food enters the stage

When dairies develop new products, they need to look beyond the dairy world, Hanne Harbo says:

“The plant trend is skyrocketing and new dairy-free products simulating dairy appear in the supermarkets everyday. Dairies face the challenge to offer alternatives to dairy-based products to be able to compete.”

Still Hanne Harbo points out that those dairies have already taken up the challenge by for example, offering a milk which is a unique blend of lactose-free milk and an oat-drink. “Mainstream consumers take the green approach and it is easier today as big brands are marketing green products and locally sourced food commodities. The so-called ‘Hood food’ consumers demand natural products, authenticity and transparency - in these challenged times of climate and environmental debate. Denmark is such a small country that all Danish products are considered Hood food, and this might be why we succeed on the international gastronomy scene,” she says.

Trust in products

Leif Friis Jørgensen shares Hanne Harbo’s analysis and adds: “The notion of what is local is interesting as it is a divergent term, but what is even more important is transparency; that you believe in the story of the product and trust the brand. Innovation is about emotions. Personally, I truly believe in the organic approach and I have the intention of making things better day by day,” he says. “Like I always say; if the coffee is bad, then make it better instead of complaining!”

Well, I won’t complain over my airport coffee – even if it took me a while to decide on a whole milk, double-shot large for my morning flight. It was just what I needed to kick start my day.