

Amazing Nondairy Milk

About 20 years ago sales of soymilk, a beverage made of blending soy beans and water, began to climb. Soymilk was soon followed in the marketplace by milk made from rice, soy-rice blends, almonds, oats, and mixed grains.

Today you'll find a wide variety of nondairy milk in most markets. Try them, and you will discover a favorite. Some nondairy milk is refrigerated, and other comes in aseptic packages with a shelf life of up to a year. Still others are available in powdered form, which is handy for traveling and backpacking. There's a flavor for everyone, including plain, vanilla, chocolate, carob, strawberry, and even coffee. Many brands of nondairy milk are organic and made with non-genetically modified ingredients.

Why would those of us who were raised drinking cow's milk become nondairy milk drinkers and ignore the messages of white-lipped celebrities in magazine ads? First there's the environmental factor. The conversion of nutritious plant materials consumed by dairy cows into milk is inefficient. For example, an acre of land that can produce 2700 calories of oats yields only 410 calories in the form of milk, according to U.S. government statistics in Keith Akers' *A Vegetarian Sourcebook*.

The number of dairies in this country has dropped from over 4 million in 1940 to less than 100,000 today, and today's dairies are much larger than before. They can contain as many as 20,000 cows who produce enormous amounts of manure. Even cow's milk that is marketed as organic can come from farms with several thousand cows. Each dairy cow produces about 115 lbs. of manure a day, which washes off into the ground water or into often insecure open cesspools. The stench pollutes the air of nearby communities. (See Sierra Club publication, "America's Wasting Away: Public Health Threatened by Corporate Livestock Factories.")

Then there's the health factor. About 2/3 of the human population on our planet suffers from some degree of lactose intolerance and cannot digest the lactose in cow's milk. Many parents and school districts are asking that nondairy soymilk be made available in the National School Lunch Program so that children of all ethnic backgrounds may drink a wholesome beverage that they can digest. The American Academy of Pediatrics advises that all children under one year of age be breast fed, if possible, and not drink cow's milk. Many families are raising their children, toddlers through teens, on nondairy milk that is fortified with nutrients such as calcium, Vitamin D, and vitamin B12. Nondairy milk is a healthful alternative for all who want to lower their intake of saturated fat and cholesterol and avoid residues of hormones, antibiotics and other drugs that are routinely administered to dairy cows.

Organic whole cow's milk shares many of the disadvantages of conventional whole cow's milk. Both contain saturated fat and cholesterol, cause pollution, and are inefficiently produced nourishment for humans.

Those who give plant-based nondairy milk a serious try find that it tastes better than cow's milk, digests more easily, has a more healthful nutrient profile, and easily takes the place of cow's milk in their meals.

