

PLANET FOOD

August 2001

ICE-CREAM

EDITORIAL – August 2001



I am very keen to give my children good quality ice cream. Not for them the multi-coloured, synthetic tasting blocks or Mr Whippy / Whirly (whatever) style cornets. They are able to have delicious, good quality locally made ice creams – clotted cream, double cream and honeycomb varieties, to name but a few.

And in the last few years there has been a dramatic rise in what's available – some of it even organic. This week I will be talking to an organic ice cream maker – Rocombe Farm, one who uses goat's milk – Cherry Tree Farm, and one who specialises in being local and British - Lovingtons. I will also be looking at the difference between cheap ice creams and the good quality more expensive offerings.

I think that when you are out and about, nothing tastes as good as ice cream in a cornet. But watch out because some tourist venues are reverting back to packaged products to avoid 'health and safety' issues and because scooping out ice creams is more labour-intensive. If you go on holiday in Britain, look out for locally made, high quality ice creams and support those offering them.

WHAT'S QUALITY?

'Pay a lot and eat a little' advises the **Food Commission** in relation to ice creams. They point out that much of the ice cream for sale is a bit of a con because it doesn't contain any cream at all. The main ingredients are vegetable fat, sugar, air and water, as well as flavours and colourings.

The **Ice-cream Alliance**, on the other hand, whose mission is to protect and inform the ice cream industry, say that ice cream has 'nutritional integrity'. By UK law they must have a minimum of 5% fat and whilst most have around 7%, the very maximum fat content would be around 16%. And there will be about the same amount of sugar. The cheaper ones will contain more milk solids – part of the milk, which is not fat or water, such as calcium. All ice cream contains more milk protein weight for weight than milk itself and far less fat than cream.

Interestingly, Italian ice creams are not allowed to be sold in the UK as 'ice cream'. They may be described as 'iced dessert' or something like that, to get around the fact that they do not contain enough fat – only about 2% in general. But they do have more sugar. US ice creams on the other hand have more fat and less sugar.

Ice cream has only been around for about 100 years and it has evolved over this time. During the 2nd World War the government encouraged the use of non-dairy fats for ice cream making. This was because it was thought that eating ice cream was morale boosting, but milk was too precious to use for this purpose.

Although it is rumoured that one major ice cream manufacturer used pig fat, at this time, this is apparently totally untrue. The main vegetable oil used and still in use today is hydrolysed palm kernel oil, also known as HPKO. It is a white vegetable fat which, contrary to fears, causes no problems for people with nut allergies, and is used by about 70% of ice cream makers in this country.

Eggs are a key ingredient for home-made ice creams. But very few ice cream makers now use eggs in their products – they use stabilisers, such as xanthum and guar gum instead. They say that this keeps the product better if you want to get it in and out of the freezer.

Ice cream, unlike any other solid food I can think of, is sold by volume rather than weight. This means that manufacturers can choose how much air to insert. If there were no air the ice cream would be a solid block of ice. But air is cheap. It is not taxed and it is not necessary to declare how much a

product contains. Cheap ice creams tend to weigh less. So pound for pound or kilo for kilo you may not be paying much more for the quality products!

BST – NOT BSE

It's a bit of a mouthful: BST stands for bovine somatotrophin, a natural hormone produced in the pituitary glands of cows to stimulate milk production.

Normally cows produce just enough BST for their own needs. But some years back genetic engineers worked out how to program bacteria to churn out lots of the BST hormone. They then injected this hormone into cows and found it boosted the amount of milk they produced by 10-15%.

The American companies who came up with BST also claim that it helps cows make better use of their feed and can cut down on the amount of methane they produce, slowing down global warming! Critics, on the other hand, say that farmers using BST have found levels of disease rising in their herds and vets claim that cows' immune systems may be weakened, increasing levels of mastitis (an udder infection). There are also concerns about side-effects, such as inflammation due to repeated injections, falling rates of conception and lameness caused by difficulty in walking with swollen udders.

Nor does the saga end there. Some of these diseases are treated with antibiotics, which in turn means there could be antibiotic residues in milk. And worryingly, scientists have found higher levels of antibiotic resistance in BST-treated herds. There are other health concerns too.

So why is this relevant to ice creams? BST is banned in all EU countries and milk from BST cows cannot be imported into this country. But BST milk is common in the US - about 30% of farms use it - and it is not segregated.

In the UK we import over 2,000 tonnes of US ice cream into this country? *Ben & Jerry's* have taken a stand on the issue and will not use BST milk. They buy from a local dairy co-operative and pay more. Can we be sure that other US ice cream companies are not selling us products containing BST milk?

This article is largely taken from 'The New Foods Guide' written by John Elkington and Julia Hailes, published by Gollancz 1999

ICE CREAM DREAM

Interview with Peter Redstone from Rocombe Farm

"From the very beginning all we ever wanted to do was to produce fantastic ice cream that would make you say 'Wow'"

Peter Redstone puts the inspiration of starting an ice cream company down to his American wife Suzanne. She went on childhood holidays in an idyllic New Hampshire setting and the neighbouring dairy farm started making ice cream.

Peter and Suzanne got married in 1970 and moved to London. Four years later, motivated by a desire for a better family lifestyle, they packed up and moved to a working farm in Devon, setting up the enterprise along with both sets of parents and at least one lot of siblings – a real family affair.

Although they started with Jersey cows, it took them about 13 years before they realised their ice cream dream. In 1987 they opened an ice cream shop in Torquay. The whole idea was to show that ice cream can be food, not just confectionary. And they used simple ingredients, without lots of chemicals and colourings, as well as reducing the amount of sugar to well below the industry norm.

The first shop was very successful and got lots of publicity. They put a big effort into the design of their packaging. By the time they moved to another site in Torquay they were making a new flavour every day – using seasonal fruit and other quality ingredients. By 1995 they had made about 2000 flavours and stopped developing more. Although vanilla is still the most popular, other big sellers are Lemon Meringue, Crunchies 'n Cream and Super Chocolate Chip.

It took Peter and Suzanne about six years to extricate themselves from conventional farming. By 1986 the farm was totally organic and registered with the Soil Association. So the milk used in their ice creams has always been organic and they were allowed to say this on the pack. But in 1997 they decided they wanted to go the whole way and make a totally organic ice cream – it took them 12 months to convert all their recipes to organic ingredients.

Rocombe Farm has moved a long way from the one shop in Torquay. It now sells its products all over Britain – to caterers, shops and tourist attractions. The original farm cannot provide enough milk to meet its needs, so it buys from the Organic Milk Suppliers Co-operative, without which, Peter asserts, the UK organic milk market would not have developed so successfully.

A planning refusal for expansion of Rocombe Farm's production facility in 1997 forced the next major move. They started a partnership with Yeo Valley, a major organic dairy company, who helped them develop a new factory premises, near Newton Abbott. In December 2000 the relationship got deeper and Rocombe Farm became a wholly owned subsidiary of Yeo Valley Organic.

Rocombe Farm ice cream is a real success story. It is now available through most of the major multiples, as well as being very strong in Devon. And they have started making organic sorbets too – lemon, mango and country berry (blackberries, blackcurrants, strawberries, raspberries and elderberries) are available. I wonder if it is possible to create 2000 flavours of sorbet!

GOAT'S MILK ICE CREAM

Interview with Brian & Lynne Walton, of Cherry Tree Farm Foods
"We are not aware of anyone else doing goat's milk ice cream"

Brian and Lynne Walton are another husband and wife team. They were looking for a business idea, when they saw a 'good life' style programme on television. Seeing a couple making heavy weather of rearing goats, Brian thought that he could do it better. They originally thought they might do yoghurt but decided that ice cream would mean less wastage.

It has taken the Waltons four years to get where they are. For the first two years they had to give away goat's milk because they hadn't yet got the proper licenses. They have now been trading for about 18 months, during which time they have had to deal with foot and mouth. Lynne says that this was drastic for them. They sold much of their produce through farmers markets and suddenly there weren't any. No country shows either.

Foot and mouth also meant a big increase in vet's fees because restrictions on animal movements meant they couldn't take the goats to surgery. Kid goats have to have their horns removed. And because they are more sensitive than calves they have to be anaesthetised, while this is happening – so a vet is required.

The number of goats at Cherry Tree Farm has swelled to 130 with the recent arrival of 30 kids, born on the farm. They started with 3 goats and are building up their herd – mainly *British Toggenburgs*. Lynne says that they are fortunate to have some show goats because they have a lovely temperament and are good for milking.

Organic principles for goats works on the amount of land per animal, to minimise the risk of getting parasites. The Waltons say they do not have enough land to be organic, although they don't use any herbicides or pesticides and the lady who owned the house before didn't either.

The goats prefer hedges and trees to grass. Unlike mountain goats they particularly don't like wind and rain, so they are kept inside in the winter. Whereas sheep have lanolin in their wool to protect them from getting wet, the goats don't and they are prone to viral pneumonia.

The Walton's milk parlour has spaces for 18 goats. It is a blend of modern and traditional. They can milk 2 goats at a time and work their way through. The milk is then filtered by hand, to take any bits out of it. Some is sold unpasteurised to local customers, but much of it is made into ice cream on the

same day. Flavours are added at a later stage. Brian says that they probably get about 70-80 litres of ice cream every day.

Cherry Tree Farm are keen to point out that their real objective is to produce good quality ice cream. They use goat's milk, cream, eggs and unrefined sugar, as well as vanilla from Madagascar and proper fruit for the different flavours. So far they have seven flavours of ice cream, 2 sorbets and they also sell fresh custard and chocolate drink, made from goat's milk.

They say that people are often put off by the idea of goat's milk products, because they think it will have a strong rank taste. I managed to sample the different flavours at a local 'eel fair', where Brian and Lynne had a stand. The ice creams were delicious and creamy. If I had not known they were made from goat's milk, it would not have occurred to me.

Brian Walton worked for 25 years at a major dairy company, which gave him lots of experience in relevant areas. He decided that rather than put all the money into packaging and marketing, he would put it into making a good quality product. Interestingly he was in part inspired by Rocombe Farm ice cream, which he tried a number of years ago and came home raving about. Although they are still a small-scale enterprise, they are beginning to get interest from the major multiples. Look out for Cherry Tree Farm products and see what you think.

NEW BRITISH – NOT AMERICAN

Interview with Giles Barber from Lovingtons

Giles Barber says that premium ice cream in this country really came from the US. What he and his business partner Mike Gregory have done is to take a totally English approach – he calls it 'New British'. They like to source their ingredients locally, if they can.

In fact, one of the main reasons, Giles says, that Lovingtons have not gone the organic route is because there would not be enough local organic cream to supply their needs. He says that Lovingtons is situated in one of the best dairy areas in the world and they want to buy what's here rather than import from countries like Denmark.

Before they teamed up in 1997, Mike had been making ice cream for nearly 15 years and Giles' family had been in the dairy business, making cheese, for 100 years. So Mike had the ice cream know-how and Giles the milk. Both their wives were pregnant at the start of the venture but they had enough confidence to get going.

So far they have concentrated on the South West but they are now branching out to supply on a national basis. They have already got first and business class customers on some airlines eating their products (they are not allowed to tell us which ones).

I'm a big Lovingtons fan and really appreciate it when local tourist attractions are offering their ice cream and cornets.

ICE CREAM CONTACTS

Ben & Jerry's, are a US company who have strong social and ethical policies. They are now owned by Unilever.

10 Charter Place, High Street, Egham, Surrey TW20 9EA Tel: 0178 443 9900 www.benjerry.co.uk

Cherry Tree Farm, produces ice cream from goats milk.

Jeffries Lane, Spring Gardens, Frome, Somerset Tel: 01373 454 655 / no website

Food Commission campaigns on food related issues.

www.foodcomm.org.uk

Ice cream Alliance are the trade association for independent ice cream companies.

Tel: 0115 985 8505 / www.icecream.org

Lovingtons

Lovington, Nr Castle Cary, Somerset Tel: 01963 240 262

Organic Milk Suppliers Co-operative distribute and sell organic milk for members.

Court Farm, Loxton, Axbridge, Somerset BS26 2XG Tel: 01934 750244 www.organicmilk.co.uk

Rocombe Farm makes super-premium organic ice cream.

Newton Abbott, Devon Tel: 01626 872 291 / www.rocombefarm.co.uk

Yeo Valley Organic makes organic yoghurt, cream, butter, crème fraiche, compote and ice cream.

Cannington Creamery, Cannington, Nr Bridgwater, Somerset / Tel: 01278 652243 / www.yeo-organic.co.uk