Writing Sample
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Custom Content

Note: This course was created as an informational piece that would be added to existing resources. It is scripted as a real-life interaction between store employees and a customer. Development notes are also included for context.

Where Does Milk Come From?

Graphics: Scene changes to dairy department area.
Audio: Sounds of a grocery store in the background.

Manager to himself: Time to get back out on the department floor and make sure everything is still looking good. Hmmm, that shopper looks confused about something.

Manager to Shopper #2: Hello. How are you today? Can I help you with anything?

Shopper #2: You know I have heard a lot lately about food miles and buying local, but I can't seem to figure out which products I should buy. I feel so overwhelmed.

Manager to Shopper #2: Taking care of the environment and buying products locally is a growing concern for many people today. You'd be happy to know that like most stores, the dairy that supplies us is located less than 100 miles from here and comes from a local *family farm*.

Shopper #2: A family farm?

Manager to Shopper #2: Yes. Most people don't realize that approximately 98 percent of all dairies are family owned and operated. Many family farms are quite large operations enabling family members to make a living from the farm. Dairy farmers are productive members of their communities and care deeply about the health and welfare of the consumers who purchase their products.

Whether a family owned farm or not, dairy farmers follow best management practices to ensure that their dairy cows are healthy and well cared for, that the environment on and around their farms is protected, and that the milk they produce is safe and of high quality.

Shopper #2: I can imagine that since the livelihood of the majority of their family depends on income from the farm, that the care of their cows is quite important to them.

Manager to Shopper #2: That's true. Last year I had the opportunity to visit the farm that supplies us and got a chance to talk with the farmer himself. His family depends on healthy cows. Proper animal care leads to the production of high-quality milk. Nutritious diets, healthy living conditions, and good medical care are all essential for a healthy and productive herd. Animal scientists and dairy farmers continually explore different ways to improve the comfort and health of dairy cows. In addition to the farmer and his family, veterinarians play an important role in dairy cow health by helping farmers implement on-farm management systems and computer tracking of cow health to allow for tailoring disease prevention and treatment for individual cow needs. By adopting practices such as milking sanitation and regular veterinary care, dairy farmers increase the well-being of their herd by reducing the risk of disease and infections and increase the production of wholesome milk.

Shopper #2: You know I have heard something about antibiotics and steroids in milk. Is that a real concern?

Manager to Shopper #2: It's important to know that dairy cows are not routinely treated with antibiotics. When illness requires cows to be treated with antibiotics, strict U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) guidelines are followed to withhold the sale of milk. When a cow's milk is withheld, she is not put back into the milking herd until her milk tests free of antibiotics.

On Screen Text: Download the ***MDA Animal Care Fact Sheet*** for more information.

Additionally, there have been a number of technological breakthroughs that have lead to more productive herds. One is rbST supplementation, which uses bovine somatotropin, a natural hormone found in all lactating mammals, to help cows

produce more milk. rbST is not harmful to cows' health but requires more management. Recent research shows it helps reduce the amount of environmental resources needed to produce milk.

rbST is not a steroid, but a protein hormone that is digested as any other protein. The science as it relates to human health is clear—it is safe. Research conducted on nutritional and other quality measures of conventional, rbST-free, and organic milk found that there was essentially no effect on the milk's hormone composition between the different types of milk.

On Screen Text: Download the ***MDA Milk and Hormone Fact Sheet*** to learn more about the use of bovine somatotropin and the safety of milk.

Shopper #2: That is really great to know. So, in addition to caring for their cows, I bet dairy farmers try to take good care of their land too?

Manager to Shopper #2: Most dairy farmers not only work on their farms, but they live on them, too. So, it is important to them to protect the land, water, and air for their animals, families, surrounding communities, and for future generations.

Additionally, environmental practices on all dairy farms are tightly regulated by both federal and state agencies. Greenhouse gases (GHG) are an environmental concern for everyone because they can deplete the Earth's ozone layer, which results in higher temperatures. Methane is just one of the many GHGs that are found in our atmosphere. Any animal that eats forage produces methane gas (CH4), not just cows.

Proper nutrition plays a big role in reducing methane gas, so the diet and care of cows has to be carefully managed. The steps dairy farmers have done to take care of their cows and the land can be seen in tangible results such as:

- Improved herd management (such as cow health).
- Improved nutrition and feeding practices.
- And, improved genetics.

Shopper #2 to Manager: Wow, I didn't know there was so much involved with making dairy products.

Manager to Shopper #2: Earlier, you mentioned food miles. The concept of "food miles" was created to demonstrate the distances foods travel before they reach the consumer. The premise is that the farther food travels, the larger the carbon footprint and the more non-renewable resources that are required before consumption. A typical estimate is that the food industry accounts for 10 percent of all fossil fuel use in the United States. Of all the energy consumed by the food system, only about 20 percent goes toward production. The remaining 80 percent is associated with processing, transportation, home refrigeration, and preparation.

Shopper #2 to Manager: So, let me get this right…

Quiz

Question on family farms
Question on care of cows
Question on sustainability

Shopper #2 to Manager: It has been very interesting to talk to you. Thanks for all the information. I feel much more confident buying my milk and supporting our local dairy farmer.

Manager to Shopper #2: Have a great day.

Shopper #2 to Manager: You too.