



Got (Moose) Milk?

A UN report touting moose juice as an alternative to cow milk overlooked some important considerations.

Visions of milkmaids chasing mother moose through the Maine North Woods danced in our heads when a United Nations food agency published its report about the potential of dairy products to improve nutrition for hundreds of millions of poor people. As high demand raises the price of cow milk, the report proposes, people might turn to milk from other species, like goats, camels, llamas – and moose.

An estimated 76,000 moose dwell in Maine's forests. Their milk, it turns out, has an impressive nutritional profile. It's got more than twice the amount of fat and protein of cow's milk and a significant amount of the cell-protecting mineral selenium. Moreover, moose milk is low in lactose, so the UN report suggests it might make an alternative source of dairy for people who are lactose intolerant.

But how, we wondered, does one milk a moose? The milkmaids of our imagination were no help; they were in hot pursuit of uncooperative moose cows, pails dangling imploringly from their outstretched hands. The UN report doesn't say, either, though it does make a passing reference to a handful of moose milking farms in Russia and Sweden. We called one of them, Ågens Hus

("The Moose House") in Bjurholm, Sweden.

"To milk them, you should have them from when they are first born – the first days are very important," says Ulla Johansson, owner with her husband Christer of Europe's only moose dairy farm. The Johanssons acquired their first two moose, Halga and Charlie, from a zoo when they were one week old. Their herd has now grown to seventeen, but only three moose are milked, and they can only produce milk about half the year – right after they give birth. Each calf gets his mother's milk flowing, then it is weaned to a bottle and Ulla or Christer step in to milk the cow by hand. "We are the only ones who can milk them," Ulla says. "They think we're their calves."

It can take up to two hours to milk one moose, Ulla says. Each cow yields about one gallon of milk a day (by contrast, a dairy cow produces on average six to seven gallons a day). That's why Ågens Hus moose cheese is among the most expensive in the world – it sells for a jaw-dropping \$550 per pound.

Surely, we thought, there's got to be a less expensive way to acquire milk?

This time, our milkmaids had the answer. In our mind's eye, they had exited the woods and were on their way back to the cow barn.

— VIRGINIA M. WRIGHT

FOR THE RECORD

Last year, Penobscot resident Becky Bunker enlisted a neighbor to help count her collection of decorative snowmen and women. Two weeks later, the tally stood at 9,998 – and that was with three totes full of snowmen still unaccounted for. Today, Bunker estimates the collection is near 13,000 strong, and she's filed with Guinness World Records for confirmation that hers is the largest (the current official record holder, a German man with 3,143 snowmen, poses little threat of catching up). Bunker's snowperson surplus, now 14 years in the making, began when her late uncle gave her a pair of sad-looking snowmen and jokingly challenged his niece to find an uglier one. Since then, Bunker has continued collecting in his memory, transforming a gag gift into a longtime hobby. Now, the wintry spectacle has become a yearly tradition. Each September, Bunker pulls the collection from storage and displays it in all but one room of her house – only her son's bedroom is marked as a strict no-snowman zone. Her snowpeople come from across the globe and manifest themselves in every shape and size: as figurines, dinnerware, furniture covers, wall art, garlands, and more. Then, in February, they return to storage. Bunker, as you might expect, can't possibly pick a favorite. "I love them all," she says of her festive collection. "They just melt your heart." — CAROLINE PRADERIO

