

NEW IDEAS

The most difficult part of operating the program was sample handling (collection and delivery). These costs were higher than the fees for the tests. These costs could be reduced if more farms participated. Ultimately, the agency in charge of regulating dairy products should incorporate the concepts from this project into a framework for an alternative system for regulating farmstead cheese, i.e., made on the farm only from the milk of the farm's herd or flock.

The next step is to implement this program on a larger scale in New England.

PRACTICES

The program was effective. However, it has only been tried by myself and is largely my creation. I propose that experienced dairy microbiologists and technicians become involved in a larger discussion concerning the best strategy to assure safe farmstead cheese production. I would like the results from the past two years to act as building blocks for the construction of a regulatory system, which concerns itself with farmstead cheese. The European Union has this type of system.

The practice of testing raw milk for the bacteria in the program should be continued as it provides farmstead cheesemakers with timely results to improve and maintain the quality of their milk and cheese.

Assurance of product safety is of paramount concern to food producers. Food safety problems and associated negative publicity threaten the viability of farmstead cheesemakers, so pro-active steps such as the development and implementation of risk reduction programs are necessary. Although larger companies have adequate resources to develop HACCP plans, this is not easy for small-scale and farmstead cheese producers to accomplish. This project showed that a technician could effectively meet the needs of four farmstead cheese producers. This approach could serve as a model for future efforts to create HACCP-type plans or "risk reduction" programs for other small-scale cheese businesses.

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