

## Agriculture by Marcia Merry

### ADM pushes ersatz milk

*While attention is focused against bovine growth hormone, the food cartel gears up for "vegetable milk."*

Over this past winter, Archer Daniels Midland (ADM), the soybean wing of the world cartel of food companies, added a new twist to its Sunday morning television advertisements on the network news shows: shots of luscious, flowing milk. But look again. The pitch is for vegetable milk, not cow's milk. This is not said in words, but the milk spots are spliced into scenes of vegetarian "meat" burgers—ADM's new direct-marketing product.

What this dramatizes is that the food cartel has placed ersatz milk next on the national menu for the United States, following the example of how cartel policies succeeded in pushing margarine, vegetable fat, to replace butter. In England, for decades, the "ice cream" most commonly consumed has nothing to do with milk or cream. It is also a vegetable-fat product.

ADM, a Decatur, Illinois-based giant company that functions as the soybean-processing arm of the Cargill empire, has positioned itself to promote and dominate a new vegetarian era. ADM is the largest soybean-processing company in the world, and plans to make big bucks off the new meatless, milkless age.

This is part of the necessary context in which to view the controversy over the synthetic bovine hormone that can cause cows to produce more milk, and whether it should get Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approval. There has been a hue and cry that approval for the hormone's use would cause a flood of milk onto the market, that will drive farm milk prices

down and bankrupt the independent family farmer. The public is told that the milk from cows receiving the hormone would be tainted.

In reality, thousands of family dairy farms are being bankrupted right now, without the availability of the growth hormone. Fighting against its approval has been a distraction while farmers are being ruined, and people's diets continue to deteriorate for lack of milk and the means to buy quality foods.

The veterinary science, and food chemistry, of the issue is clear cut. The hormone, known either as BGH (bovine growth hormone) or BST (bovine somatotropin), causes no problem in the milk. If the hormone is administered during the lactation period, the cow will give more milk. But more feed is required, and the years of productive lifespan of the animal may be decreased.

Therefore, whether to give an individual cow, or a herd, BST is an animal husbandry decision best left up to the farmer who owns the livestock.

It may be some futuristic speculation to anticipate the day when giant factory farms are run by cartel hired-hands, where dairy herds shot up with BST give floods of milk. True, the cartel crowd would find such a vision acceptable. The rationale you would hear is, "Milk is milk," just as such "free market" fanatics as Milton Friedman say, for example, "Money is money, even if it comes from dope."

But one is falling into wishful delusions if they presume that provision will be made to supply milk to the

general public, if the cartels continue to determine food and farm policy. At ADM's annual stockholders meeting three years ago, ADM chairman Dwayne Andreas spoke glowingly of the day when soy milk would displace cow's milk. He pointed to its acceptance in Asia, and said that acceptance may come slowly in the United States. But, he said, "it will come."

In the meantime, even without the FDA's decision to approve the use of BST, dairy farmers are going under, and more and more children are going without milk. That is the moral issue to fight over, *not* the pros-and-cons of BST's safety. Technically, it is safe. But that is not the issue.

There is no "free market" in operation in which "supply and demand" determines farm milk prices. Right now, farm milk prices are being kept artificially low by collusion between the U.S. Department of Agriculture with the food cartel (Nestlé's, Unilever, Kraft, LaBatts, the chocolatiers, and a few others).

To meet all his costs and get a fair return, the dairy farmer should receive at least \$26 for a hundred pounds of raw farm milk. At present, the highest level of prices is only around \$15. What is required is the \$26 per hundredweight price, or parity price, and that is the issue.

The fight is over a moral and competent food policy. There is a shortage of milk for quality dairy foods in the daily diet in the United States, and a drastic shortage in milk output worldwide. Global milk production in 1991 fell 2% from the year before. According to a special analysis of the world dairy situation by the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization, based in Rome, last November, the fall of "effective demand"—referring to the inability of people to afford to buy the milk products they want—is masking the falling output of milk.