

Milk and Hormones Fact Sheet

Bovine somatotropin (bST) is a naturally occurring protein hormone in cows. bST helps young cattle grow and adult cows produce milk. A small amount of this hormone is naturally present in all milk, including organic products. When you drink milk, bST is completely broken down by digestion like any other protein.

Some dairy farmers choose to supplement their cows with a synthetic version of bST (known as rbST) to increase milk production – it is not added to the milk itself. This use of supplemental bST was approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in 1993 after extensive review; the safety of milk from rbST-supplemented cows has been affirmed over the past 20 years.¹

Dairy farmers who use rbST say it helps boost their herds' milk production, which can help with their own business, as well as to ensure a plentiful milk supply. It is estimated that about 30% of U.S. dairy farmers choose to use rbST with their herds, accounting for 20-25% of cows.²

Safety of Milk

Scientific studies have concluded that there is no difference between milk from cows that are given rbST and milk from cows that are not. Regulatory agencies in 50 countries, including Canada and the European Union, have also affirmed the safety of milk and meat from cows supplemented with rbST, and that there is no difference in the milk.

Separate reviews of the data, with the same safety conclusions, have been conducted by the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the World Health Organization, the Office of the Inspector General of the Department of Health and Human Services, *Journal of the American Medical Association*, *Pediatrics* and the *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*.

And it is important to note that giving cows rbST has no effect on hormone levels in the milk itself. An NIH expert panel, among others, has made this conclusion.³

Dairy products are among the most tested and regulated foods in this country, and American dairy products are among the safest in the world.

The dairy industry supports choices in the dairy case, and some farmers, manufacturers and retailers will support different types of production that may or may not include the use of rbST. But it's important to understand that carton to carton, bottle to bottle, all milk is wholesome, safe and nutritious. All milk contains the same combination of nutrients that makes dairy products an important part of a healthy diet.

Additional Resources

- Dairy Farming Today:
www.dairyfarmingtoday.org
- National Dairy Council Food Safety Fact Sheet:
www.nationaldairycouncil.org/NationalDairyCouncil/Nutrition/Safety/foodSafetyfactsheet.htm
- FDA's position on the safety of rbST:
www.fda.gov/cvm/RBRPTFNL.htm or www.fda.gov/bbs/topics/ANSWERS/ANS00564.html
- Cornell University rbST fact sheet:
www.cfsan.fda.gov/%7Eear/CORBST.html

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¹ Scientific Status Report - #19 Hormones and Milk. National Dairy Council, March 5, 2007.

² *The Scientist*. "Dairy economics: Milking blood from a stone". February, 2007. Vol. 21, No. 2.

³ National Institute of Health (NIH). NIH Technology Assessment Conference statement on bovine somatotropin. *Journal of the American Medical Association*. 1991 265:1423-1425. URL: <http://consensus.nih.gov/1990/1990BovineSomatotropinta007html.htm>