

MAKING AN IMPACT FOR OVER FORTY YEARS

By Maura Keller

When it comes to understanding the needs of dairy producers, it helps when a company founder and entrepreneur has first-hand knowledge of the dairy industry, by either being a producer himself, or by having grown up on a dairy farm.

For Darrell Bigalke, the founder and owner of QualiTru Sampling Systems (formerly QMI) in Oakdale, MN, growing up on a dairy farm offered him intimate daily knowledge of the vital importance of quality microbiological sampling and analysis of milk. Having a background as a dairy microbiologist was also paramount.

"I started the company in 1983 with the goal of providing a sampling system for dairy processors and other

liquid food processors who want to take microbiological samples that are accurate and representative of the product that they are sampling and testing," Bigalke says. "In founding the company, I was looking to provide the industry with a more accurate way of aseptic and representative sampling and quality control." Bigalke has clearly succeeded in achieving his initial goal. After dedicating more than four decades to revolutionizing

inline aseptic sampling of the dairy industry, this dairy microbiologist has put his Minnesota-based company on the proverbial map, all while helping prevent millions of consumers from experiencing serious food-borne illnesses.

Specifically, QualiTru's products are being used by today's dairy farmers and processors to verify product quality, perform inline aseptic sampling for testing and quality checks in bulk tanks and silos, and for microbiological testing. In fact, as Bigalke explains, the use

ALTHOUGH DAIRY FARMERS ARE ONLY ONE SEGMENT OF QUALITRU'S CORE CLIENT BASE, THE COMPANY UNDERSTANDS THAT RAW MILK QUALITY IS THE VITAL FOUNDATION FOR QUALITY DAIRY PROCESSING.

of QualiTru's patented technology is actually referenced in the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's (FDA's) Pasteurized Milk Ordinance (Section 6) as, "approved for the





required collection of representative samples directly from farm bulk milk tanks or silos prior to the milk being transported for processing.”

According to Bigalke, the company provides a proven method of sampling used to indicate spoilage bacteria, antibacterial, and somatic cells. In addition, because of the company’s deeply rooted knowledge of the dairy industry, the QualiTru team recognizes the importance of compliance with FDA regulations for quality and safety, including for grade “A” milk and antibiotic residue testing.



Dr. Johan B. Ubbink, Professor and Head of Department of Food Science and Nutrition at University of Minnesota, Darrell Bigalke, founder of QualiTru Sampling Systems (formerly QMI), and Dr. Sandra Godden, DVM, DVs, Professor and Interim Associate Dean of Graduate Programs at University of Minnesota, College of Veterinary Medicine.

“Farmers also get paid a bonus if they can comply with a better than average result of somatic cells and bacteria count,” Bigalke says. “There is a big benefit for farmers to have accurate sampling that shows that they have a quality product that benefits everybody, from the processor to the consumer.”

“Microbiological sampling or any other microbiological analysis

is only as accurate as the sample,” Bigalke says. “Our aseptic sampling method collects accurate samples, meaning the product or the sample doesn’t become contaminated by the introduction of any foreign bacteria. So, when you take a sample with our system, you are sampling the product of the farmer or processor and not the environment.”

QualiTru also provides a wealth of standard operation procedures (SOPs) and training materials to help ensure that accurate samples are taken for optimal test results, which are imperative and contrast starkly with a standard dip sample.

“Milk stratifies so all the cream or fat, which is a premium for the dairy farmer, rises to the top so you don’t get a truly representative sample when you do a standard dip sample,” Bigalke says. That’s where QualiTru’s methodology has proven to be reliable and effective for dairy producers around the world.

Recently, QualiTru honored its founder with the Darrell Bigalke Food Safety and Food Quality Award. This annual dairy science scholarship is intended to provide the next generation of students from University of Minnesota’s College of Veterinary Medicine or College of Food, Agricultural and Natural Resource Sciences with the opportunity to pursue key issues in dairy science and food quality and safety.

Sandra Godden, Professor and Interim Associate Dean of Graduate Programs at the College of Veterinary Medicine at the



University of Minnesota, made these comments while referencing the first scholarship recipient in 2023. “This award extends Darrell Bigalke’s legacy in pioneering sampling tools that have helped dairy producers better manage their herds and allowed for enhanced efficiency for monitoring milk quality and com-



position. As a result, dairy farmers have experienced not only enhanced animal health, well-being and performance, but greater profitability and sustainability in their milking operations.”

Indeed. David Peck, owner of Marks Farms outside of Lowville, New York, said, “We direct load 300,000 pounds of milk daily and have not had failures of the QualiTru equipment. The results of the testing have been extremely accurate and dependable.”

One year ago, Bigalke and his team celebrated the company’s 40th anniversary and looking ahead, he is excited to see what the future holds for the impact the QualiTru makes on the dairy and liquid food industries.

“We started out with just a few farmers and dairy processors,” Bigalke says. “Now we have about 400 end users and we have about 40 countries that we sell our product but we are still a small niche market. We have had several patents over the years, with another patent coming on line. We are simply trying to be innovative and maintain quality sampling and quality analysis for our customers.” ■



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