

When considering the safety of milk from the point of view of the health of the consumer population it is important to bear in mind the somatic cell count, residues from synthetic pesticide and /or veterinary products, the presence of pathogens in milk and general hygiene on a dairy farm, particularly during milking. Agroecological farming aims to avoid use of synthetic pesticides and to make minimal use of conventional veterinary products and, thus, to avoid the presence of residues of these two elements in milk. The somatic cell count, linked mainly to mastitis, decreases with grazing, the lower stress level observed in those cows fed less concentrate and good hygiene on a farm, all these being vital elements of agroecological farming. It is worth noting, however, that a zero or very low somatic cell count is not of interest and a certain presence of somatic cells confirms that a cow's defence system is working properly.

The nutritional value of milk for consumers is closely related to the type of livestock management on a farm. The nutritional quality of milk varies as a result of changes in its fat content, particularly changes in the content of non-saturated fats (including conjugated linoleic acid or Omega 6 and Omega 3) and saturated fats, protein, vitamins and antioxidants. Dairy cows that obtain a significant part of their daily ration of dry matter by grazing produce milk with more nutrients and, particularly, higher levels of non-saturated fats that are healthy for the heart. Additionally, the ratio between Omega 3 and Omega 6, two non-saturated fats, is more balanced (and thus of greater interest for ideal consumer nourishment) when milk comes from cows that graze (a ratio that should not surpass 4:1 Omega 6 to Omega 3). The presence of nutrients in milk falls on farms in which cows are exploited above their genetic potential, their milk contains too much Omega 6 in relation to Omega 3 and there is a higher percentage of saturated fats.

Evidently, just as the bio-availability of different plant nutrients for cows must be analysed, the bio-availability of different nutrients in milk for consumers also needs to be considered.

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