

## Harvesting the health promise of conjugated linoleic acid

### Strawberry, French vanilla and CLA

*New 'CLA yogurt' adds science to the mix – blazing a trail for range of innovative dairy and beef opportunities.*

"A blend of technology and tradition to ensure a superior product."

This slogan of Alberta's Bles-Wold Dairy Farm touts a philosophy that has driven the business success of this operation and its popular Bles-Wold Farm Yogurt product line.

It's also a good description of the approach that is fueling progress of the CLA Network – a team of researchers, food industry representatives, health professionals and communicators, devoted to tapping the potential of natural conjugated linoleic acid (CLA) found in dairy and beef products.

Now both of these efforts have combined to support the launch of a new Bles-Wold yogurt line that is the first dairy or beef product to feature CLA content.

CLA stands for conjugated linoleic acid – a healthy, natural type of dairy and beef fat that research has linked to strong potential for a range of human health



**Bright horizons.** Co-operative efforts with industry boost CLA outlook.

benefits. These include advantages related to cancer, heart disease, diabetes, kidney disease, obesity and bone density.

The new 'CLA yogurt' was developed using research knowledge generated by the CLA Network, and is a pioneering natural CLA marketing effort that could be followed by many for a range of both dairy and beef products.

"This new yogurt represents a tremendous step forward for new health-based marketing opportunities related to natural CLA," says Bruce Beattie, a Sundre, Alta., dairy producer and chair of the CLA Network. "It's great news for consumers who enjoy dairy products and also for the dairy industry."

The progress is a major culmination of the efforts of the CLA Network and its partners, says CLA Network manager Vince Ohama of Alberta Agriculture and Food.

"The role of the CLA Network is to support CLA progress all the way from the primary production level to the retail level. The new yogurt line is a great example of the result of this effort. It's also an excellent example of the progress that can be achieved by industry, government and academia working together."

### Health focus drives progress

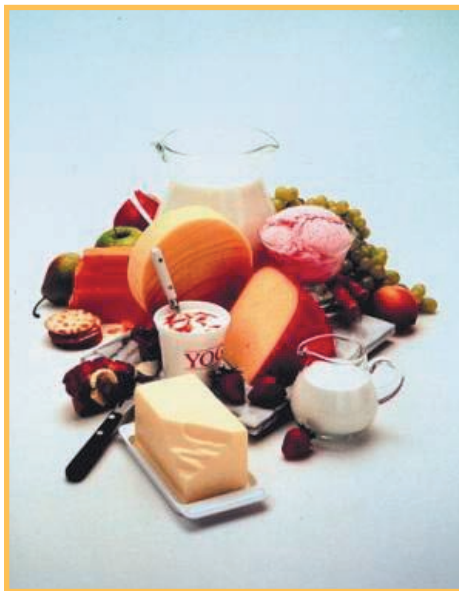
The relationship between Bles-Wold and the CLA Network grew from a mutual interest in enhancing and promoting the natural health benefits of dairy products. For Bles-Wold, this health focus has long been the driving force behind its yogurt products.

Bles-Wold Dairy Farm is owned by Tinie Eilers and her husband Hennie Bos, who operate the farm (Bles-Wold Dairy Inc.) and the yogurt business (Bles-Wold Yogurt Inc.) as part of a team of dedicated staff, with the yogurt business led by general manager Darren Bishop.

After 20 years in the dairy industry in The Netherlands, Eilers and Bos moved to Alberta in 1994 and established their operation in the Lacombe area.

The name Bles-Wold originates from the first part of Bos' hometown in Holland (Blesdijke) and the last part of Eilers hometown (Steenwijkerwold).

Producing yogurt was not in the original plan for Eilers and Bos as they built their dairy, but that changed when Eilers became interested in producing a mild, all-natural yogurt as a hobby to provide an attractive, healthy food option for the couple's daughter, then 13, who is diabetic.



**First step.** The yogurt launch leads the charge for many product opportunities.

"When we first came over from Holland there was an adjustment period and our daughter missed some of the foods from back home, including a yogurt her uncle made," says Eilers. "So we began looking at making our own yogurt. We wanted a type of yogurt that was milder, with no artificial sweetener, that she could enjoy but that would not be too sweet to affect her diabetes."

## Natural fit

What began as a hobby steadily grew into a modest but successful product initiative, with Bles-Wold Farm Yogurt becoming a reliable seller at retail outlets throughout the province.

"Bles-Wold has been serving Alberta consumers with its yogurt products since 1997, with farm fresh natural yogurt, unique in taste and flavour," says Bos. "The support from Albertans has been great. When approached by the CLA Network we recognized that adding a CLA yogurt is a good fit with the Bles-Wold philosophy."

The Bles-Wold team also recognized CLA was a good fit with the operation's production capacity. "We use our farm milk production and are well set up to change the cow ration to raise CLA levels naturally, with no artificial additives," says Eilers.

Founded in 2001, the CLA Network has conducted a broad range of research and development activities to understand and capture opportunities for natural CLA. This has included dairy production research to develop strategies, such as dietary formulations, that promote substantial, consistent CLA levels in milk. By 2005, this research had made strong advancements, and members of the CLA Network began to evaluate the opportunity for a private operation to apply this knowledge with a product focus.

"Bles-Wold was suggested by Alberta Milk, which is one of our industry member organizations, as well as by the University of Alberta, another network member and a leading dairy research organization, as a logical operation to approach," says Ohama. "Bles-Wold was attractive because of the strong interest the Bles-Wold team had in CLA. Bles-Wold also had both production and processing capacity and in general were well set-up to test-drive this type of new opportunity."

## Knowledge into opportunity

For the past two years, the CLA Network has worked directly with Bles-Wold to help it develop yogurt with

substantial, consistent CLA levels. This has included assistance with dietary formulations and other production approaches used by Bles-Wold to produce the new yogurt line.

"One of the key things we have done is to add a specific level of sunflower seed rations to the diets of our animals, as a way to support CLA levels," says Eilers. "We've had to look at how that has affected other aspects such as protein and fat levels, and then make adjustments to get a product profile we're happy with.

"We're pleased with the result and that we have been able to achieve it in a relatively short time."

The process has also included progress on the regulatory and labeling fronts, to explore options for featuring CLA content on the product packaging. That has resulted in the development of packaging that includes a statement of CLA content per serving on the front panel of the packaging, separate from a standard "Nutrition Facts" table that appears on the back panel.

"The approach is similar to how some yogurt products state the content of probiotic cultures," says Jyoti Sahasrahudhe, a food industry consultant assisting the CLA Network. "Under the current regulations, a quantitative declaration of content of CLA is allowed outside of the standard 'Nutrition Facts' table, to complement the table information."

In addition to assistance from the CLA Network and its partners, Bles-Wold hired a marketing firm to help guide the operation through a successful introduction of this innovative product line.

The new Bles-Wold product line is available at a range of supermarkets and specialty stores in Alberta. The product packaging includes a statement of CLA content as 0.12 grams per 125 gram serving of plain yogurt and 0.14 grams per 125 gram serving of flavoured yogurt. Bles-Wold is also marketing a sour cream with a statement of CLA content as 0.20 grams per 30 ml serving.

"The CLA content of these products is higher than the level typically available in yogurt products," says Eilers. "The important thing is that the level is consistent and we are able to state this level on the product."

CLA Network research has identified methods to achieve much higher levels of natural CLA in dairy products, notes Dr. John Kennelly of the University of Alberta, also part of the CLA Network's dairy production module team.

"For example, over the past 10 years we have developed feed formulations using natural ingredients that result in up to a 10 fold increase in CLA levels in milk."

Pursuing higher levels is an option for Bles-Wold and others in the future, but all efforts must progress in the context of overall production, marketing and regulatory strategies.

At the production level, the key considerations are the same whether the goal is modest CLA levels or substantially higher levels, says Kennelly. "The challenge is to do it in a way that is economical, consistent and supports the health of the animal. Those goals have been achieved with the approaches adopted by Bles-Wold to support their new yogurt line."

## Rising product profile

Due to regulatory restrictions, the statement of CLA content on product packaging is relatively modest and is not accompanied by any explanation of CLA benefits. However, simply stating CLA content taps growing awareness of CLA and encourage consumers unaware of benefits to learn more.

"Many of the consumers of our yogurt tend to be health-conscious consumers who do have a greater awareness of CLA and are more nutrition conscious generally," says Eilers. "We're also confident these consumers represent a growing market."

## Learn more

For more information on the CLA Network, visit [www.CLAnetwork.com](http://www.CLAnetwork.com) or email: [CLAnetwork@gov.ab.ca](mailto:CLAnetwork@gov.ab.ca).



**Backing producers.** CLA progress is key to support dairy producers and their industry, says Bruce Beattie.

Visit [www.CLAnetwork.com](http://www.CLAnetwork.com) for more articles on activity and progress.

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