

## EL PROGRAMA DE LECHE ESCOLAR DE FAO, EVOLUCIÓN, IMPACTOS Y DESAFÍOS.

Entrevista a Michael Griffin\*



1-How and Why was born the program of school Milk in FAO?

In 1997, as a result of a number of requests received for information on school milk programmes, it became apparent that there was no forum for the dairy industries in FAO (Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations) member countries to exchange information on school milk. FAO's Commodities and Trade Division has attempted to bridge this gap by using e-mail networks and an associated internet site as media for the exchange of information on this subject area. Consequently, FAO now serves as a world centre for the collection of information on school milk systems and offers advice and assistance to countries wishing to develop such programmes.

As part of this process, FAO has co-operated with a number of national organisations in presenting a series of conferences on the provision of milk to school-aged children. The conferences focus on providing a forum for the exchange of information and experiences between professionals working with school milk programmes. FAO's role in these conferences is principally in the area of planning the technical programme and serving as a central contact point. Topics covered depend on the particular interests of the region in which any given conference is held; however, typically, these would include an international overview of school milk programmes, the role of

milk in child nutrition, and the administration and financing of school milk programmes. Since 1998, conferences have been held in South Africa, the United Kingdom, Australia, Thailand, Austria, the Czech Republic, Colombia, Canada, Lebanon, Finland, China (Shanghai), Mexico, Sweden, Iceland, Uruguay, the United States and China (Kunming). A conference will be held in Uganda later this month (27-29 September 2005) and a further conference is planned for South Africa in March 2007. Additional requests to assist with conferences are currently being considered. As well as the conferences where FAO was requested to lend its support, a number of conferences have been held independently of FAO over recent years; many of these drew their inspiration from the organisers attending one of the above conferences.

At recent international school milk conferences, delegates have recognised the absence of a central source of information on school milk programmes and in the conference summaries have called for an international centre to be established in FAO. In the light of this, FAO is exploring the possibility of project funding to establish an **International School Milk Information Centre**, based at its headquarters in Rome. Under the project, the following activities are envisaged:

- school milk programmes will be developed and strengthened, internationally;
- policy and other advice will be provided to governments and others interested in developing school milk

programmes;

- the process of information exchange via conferences, publications, discussion groups and the internet will be expanded;
- a network of collaborating institutions, coordinated by FAO, will be established;
- the series of international conferences will be continued.

Anyone interested in joining either the School Milk e-mail list or obtaining information on future conferences or the proposed school milk information centre should contact: [Michael.Griffin@fao.org](mailto:Michael.Griffin@fao.org)

2-Which are the principal contributions of the Program?

FAO serves mainly as a central point of information exchange and as a catalyst for encouraging countries to develop school milk programmes. Consequently, the main focus of its work is:

- information exchange via e-mail Lists
- the promotion of international conferences and debate on school milk
- promotion of World School Milk Day - last Wednesday in September: currently almost 40 countries celebrate this Day each year
- a dedicated site on internet: [http://www.fao.org/es/ESC/en/20953/20999/highlight\\_25253en.html](http://www.fao.org/es/ESC/en/20953/20999/highlight_25253en.html)
- work is also undertaken to encourage information exchange on school feeding activities within FAO and between other UN agencies
- explore funding for establishing an International School Milk Information Centre at FAO.

3- To Pan-American level, what is your opinion about the development of the School Milk programs?

The region has a strong tradition of social programmes, including school feeding programmes. Many of these programmes include milk as a food item. Also, there are a number of instances where milk is provided as part of school breakfasts or as a mid-morning snack. The region has a tradition of drinking milk and consuming milk products, and also in producing milk. Therefore, combining these factors, the promotion of school milk programmes will lead to improved markets for producers, better nutrition for children and, in the longer term, a strengthening of consumer demand.

4-In the Pan-American region which are the principal challenges to expand and to improve the consumption of Milk in the schools?

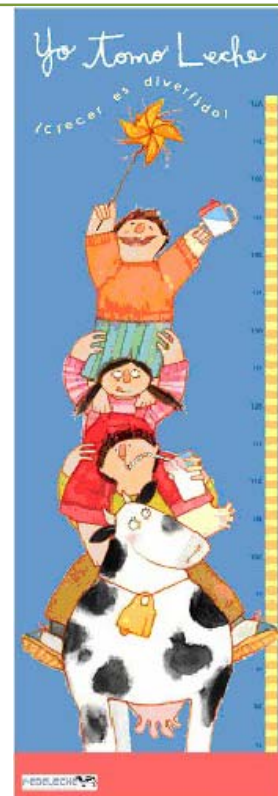
With any social programme, anywhere in the world, finance is always a challenge. Additionally, care needs to be taken that programmes are run effectively and efficiently. Perhaps most importantly, milk has to be presented in an attractive manner to students so that in later life the habit of milk consumption is firmly established.

In view of the above, ways of providing milk in schools need to be approached in a creative and dynamic manner. For example, dairy producers' associations should consider how they can take a lead in promoting such programmes, which in the final analysis

will provide the consumers of the future. As milk is a natural food for children, the industry has a winning position in this regard and should take full advantage of this. In cases where government funds are limited, full or partially self-financing systems for supplying milk to schools should be examined; that is, the parents may cover all or part of the cost. It is important to remember that, even where the main aim of a programme is «social», every effort must be made to make the milk provided to children attractive. In working in this area, all-too-often I come across people who tell me: «I don't like milk because I was forced to drink it warm or sour when I was a school».

5-Some another contribution that you want to make on the topic.

Firstly, I would like to acknowledge the support and cooperation provided by FEPALE in promoting school milk. Last year, FEPALE in cooperation with SanCor of Argentina, translated into Spanish and distributed within the region FAO's school milk video. This magazine featuring school milk is a second and very important demonstration of our collaboration. Socially, politically and economically milk is readily accepted as an ideal food for the region's children. This gives us a fantastic basis on which to build. I look to the dairy industry within the region to promote the benefits of school milk to government authorities and other decision makers.



#### \*Michael Griffin

*Michael holds a Ph.D. in the subject area of food marketing and distribution from Aberdeen University (Scotland). He has worked for a number of international agencies (FAO, the European Commission, the International Trade Centre, USAID and the International Fund for Agricultural Development). In 1990, he joined the Commodities and Trade Division of the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and has responsibility for the Division's work on milk and milk products. In his job, Michael works closely with national dairy organizations and the dairy industry in general.*



*Michael has instrumental in establishing an e-mail discussion list on school milk, which he moderates. Stemming from the Dairy Outlook and School Milk lists, Michael has participated in the organization of a number school milk conferences hosted by national dairy organizations.*

*Michael was responsible for coordinating discussion on FAO's Dairy Outlook and School Milk e-mail lists regarding, selecting a particular day on which school milk could be celebrated internationally. The first World School Milk Day held in 2000. Since then it has become an annual event and is currently celebrated in approximately 25 countries spread throughout the world.*