

What To Do With Whey: Greek Yogurt's Popularity, and Its Acid Whey Problem



by CAMBRIA BOLD | published MAY 24, 2013

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I read a very interesting article this morning in *Modern Farmer*. Apparently Greek yogurt's ascendant popularity in recent years has created a not-so-insignificant problem: acid whey waste. Acid, or sour, whey — the liquid that runs off when you strain yogurt or cottage cheese — is a troublesome byproduct: it's toxic to the natural environment, yet not easy to integrate back into the workings of a factory or farm. So what can big food companies do with the acid whey?

According to *Modern Farmer*, for every three or four ounces of milk used, Greek yogurt companies produce only one ounce of yogurt. The rest is all whey. Commercially produced whey is “roughly as acidic as orange juice,” and contains mostly lactose, or milk sugar, but also some minerals and a small amount of protein. The Northeast produced more than 150 million gallons of acid whey last year alone. Yogurt companies are so desperate to get rid of it, they’re trying to pay farmers to take it from them!

It should be noted that *acid whey*, produced by yogurt companies, is different than *sweet whey*, as produced by cheese-makers. Sweet whey has more protein and is less acidic than Greek yogurt whey, which is why cheese companies can sell sweet whey as a protein supplement or food ingredient. But you can’t do that with acid whey.

So what can be done with acid whey? Food scientists and farmers have experimented with mixing it into feed for cows, or into manure for fertilizing. But if cows eat too much acid whey, it messes up their digestive system. And the problem is always how to prevent whey from seeping into the environment. (Whey strips its surrounding environment of oxygen, which means it has the potential to turn rivers and waterways into “dead seas,” as one expert noted.)

Other possible options currently under experimentation: incorporating it into infant formula (!) or finding ways to extract sugar, whey’s dominant ingredient. For more on the acid whey problem and the research behind it, read the full article below:

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