

A Purchasing Guide to Sourcing Dairy Products Produced Without rBGH



Purchasers can take the following steps to source dairy products produced without the use of the dairy drug recombinant bovine growth hormone (rBGH generally referred to as BGH, also called rBST or Posilac (the brand name of the drug)).

Step 1: Focus your non-rBGH purchasing

Finding non-rBGH supplies of all the dairy products and foods made with dairy products in your inventory may be impractical. In addition to fluid milk products (milk, cream, half-and-half), dairy purchases typically include many other products like butter, sour cream, yogurt, ice cream, cheese, and others. Dairy products are also ingredients in many pre-made products (cream-based soups, puddings, cheese snacks or crackers, salad dressings, etc).

Therefore, most purchasers simplify the process by focusing on sourcing non-rBGH milk as a strong first step. When enough buyers demand rBGH-free milk, the use of rBGH will dwindle, eventually making all other dairy products derived from milk rBGH-free.

Step 2: Communicating with suppliers

Once you have identified the dairy (or dairies) that supply your operations with milk, you will need to communicate your preference for a non-rBGH product. You can state your preference and learn what non-rBGH products dairies have available by sending current and prospective suppliers a letter and questionnaire (a sample letter, questionnaire, and Q&A can be found on pages 2 and 3). You may also include a preference for non-rBGH dairy products when soliciting bids for future contracts.

Some suppliers may wish to meet your request but may not have a supply of non-rBGH products in place. Purchasers should determine before they contact suppliers their preferred timeline for phasing out any current rBGH-tainted dairy products. For many dairies that do not have a current supply of non-rBGH milk, phasing in such products can take between 6-12 months or longer for larger purchasers.

Step 3: Verification

Two categories of dairy products made without rBGH are available: organic and conventional. By definition, all dairy products certified as organic by the U.S.D.A. are verified by third party organic certifiers as having been produced without rBGH. Purchasers can therefore rely on organic as verification of non-rBGH status. There are also many dairies that offer non-rBGH products that are not organic (these products are sometimes labeled as containing "no artificial hormones"). Since there is no third-party certification solely for non-rBGH dairy products, purchasers need to use other means to determine the validity of suppliers' non-rBGH status, such as:

- requesting a signed affidavit from the supplier that no rBGH was used by the dairy farmers involved in producing the product;
- requesting a copy of the generic statement that the supplier requires farmers to sign declaring they will not use rBGH; and
- requesting suppliers' submit information regarding other means they use to verify farmers' production methods, such as a review of veterinary records.

Step 4: Practical considerations

Some dairies say that they would like to prohibit rBGH but that doing so is impractical given their supply chain. It is true that many dairies have diverse relationships with producers, so making the move to a non-rBGH product line can be complex. For example, a large dairy may use some milk from farmers who are part of a company cooperative (coop), and some milk from other pools of farmers, and still other milk from independent farmers. Some products (usually fluid milk, sometimes butter, yogurt, or cheese) may be produced only

with milk from the internal coop farmers, while other products are from mixed sources. In such cases, a company can more easily control products made strictly from their internal sources, but controlling the practices of farmers outside their networks is more challenging.

Large companies can exert their influence to require farmers to prohibit rBGH. Suppliers who have practical concerns need a clear signal that you will work with them on a process that can work for them.

Model Dairy Letter

A template for this model letter can be found as a Microsoft Word document at www.noharm.org/us/food/resources

Date

XYZ Farms
Street Address
City, State ZIP

Dear _____,

As a health care provider, we believe it is important to model a preventive health approach through the food we purchase and serve. Such an approach recognizes potential impacts to our patients, staff, and visitors, and equally to local and global communities from the way in which food is produced and distributed.

Our patients, staff, and visitors want safe food for their families and children. In dairy products especially, many are sensitive to food safety issues and want to insure that the products they consume are produced without artificial hormones or other unnecessary additives and with the highest standards for purity.

Many consumers are concerned about the use of recombinant bovine growth hormone (rBGH, also called RBGH, BST or Posilac). According to a USDA funded survey, 95 percent of Americans said milk from cows injected with rBGH should be labeled, and 74 percent said they had concerns about the long-term safety of milk produced using rBGH.

In light of the public health and animal welfare concerns associated with the use of rBGH in dairy production, and in recognition of our patient and staff preferences, we have decided to source dairy products that have been produced without the use of rBGH. Please let us know your ability to provide us with these products by responding to the enclosed questionnaire by [due date].

Thank you for your attention to this important concern.

Sincerely,

Your name
Your Institution

Sample Questionnaire

A template for this questionnaire can be found as a Microsoft Word document at www.noharm.org/us/food/resources
Please return by [date] to [email/fax/mailling address]

1. What is your company's policy regarding the use of rBGH (also called Posilac or rBST) in your products? (please circle one)
 - a. We allow the use of rBGH
 - b. We prohibit the use of rBGH in all products
 - c. We prohibit the use of rBGH in some products (please check products that are made without rBGH):
 - milk and other fluid milk products
 - butter
 - yogurt and/or cultured dairy (sour cream, buttermilk, etc)
 - cheese
 - ice cream
 - dry milk products
 - other (please specify)
2. If your company does not currently offer non-rBGH products but is willing to look into providing such milk or other products, approximately how long would it take for your company to have non-rBGH products available?
 - 3 months
 - 3-6 months
 - 6-12 months
 - more than 12 months
3. What measures, if any, do you use to ensure that the farmers supplying you with milk or other dairy products are not using rBGH? (check any that apply.)
 - Signed affidavits
 - Site visits to dairy farms
 - Review of farms' veterinary records
 - Third-party verification/certification
 - Other

Questions and Answers on [hospital name] rBGH Policy and Implementation

A template for this Q&A can be found as a Microsoft Word document at www.noharm.org/us/food/resources

Q: What is recombinant rBGH?

A: rBGH is a genetically engineered drug administered to dairy cows in order to boost milk production. Since its introduction, the use of rBGH has been controversial and there have been increasing scientific concerns about its safety.

Q: Isn't rBGH essential in dairy production?

A: No. rBGH is intended to increase cows' milk production, but overproduction of milk has been common in the U.S. for many years. Many family farm organizations oppose rBGH as use of the drug favors large industrialized dairy operations.

Q: What are the risks of rBGH in dairy production?

A: Cows injected with rBGH suffer increased health problems, often requiring an increase in the use of antibiotics in dairy production. There is a strong consensus among independent experts that the overuse of antibiotic in animal farming contributes to the increase in human diseases that resist treatment by common antibiotics. In addition there is some concern that consumption of milk from cows treated with rBGH may be associated with increased risk of certain cancers. While this association has not been confirmed, because rBGH is unnecessary to produce milk we feel it is prudent to err on the side of avoiding this potential risk.

Q: Why is buying non-rBGH milk important to [hospital name]?

A: As a health care leader, it is our responsibility to adopt

best practices for the health of our patients, staff, and the community throughout our operations.

Q: Isn't rBGH approved by the Food and Drug Administration?

A: The FDA's approval of rBGH has been controversial, and other food safety regulators in Canada, Europe and elsewhere who looked at the same data have rejected rBGH. Scientists and regulators in Europe and Canada denied approval of rBGH based on unanswered concerns about human and animal health.

Q: How will [hospital name] implement its rBGH-free policy?

A: We have surveyed suppliers and are looking for sources that will provide us with rBGH-free milk. We hope to establish a consistent supply of rBGH-free milk within the next 12 months. Ultimately we hope to establish rBGH-free supplies of all dairy products we use.

Q: How can [hospital name] know that milk it buys is rBGH-free?

A: We are requesting that suppliers require dairy farmers to sign affidavits agreeing to comply with our non-rBGH preference. In addition, we are asking suppliers for information about other measures they use to ensure compliance, such as site visits to dairy farms and review of farms' veterinary records. We may also procure milk from suppliers that are third-party certified as rBGH-free (such as organic producers).

Resources

Available at the HCWH Healthy Food in Health Care Website: www.noharm.org/us/food/issue

Fact Sheets

Food and Food Purchasing: A Role for Health Care

As places of healing, hospitals have a natural incentive to provide food that is healthy for people and the environment in which we live. Food supply can be met in a variety of ways which have consequences in terms of nutrition, disease risk, public health, environmental health, and social and economic well being.

Healthy Food In Health Care: A Menu of Options

Many health care institutions have begun to adopt practices and policies to support a healthy food system. Following on their model, your facility can improve the quality of food choices by choosing among the recommendations offered in this Menu of Options.

Antibiotic Resistance and the Agricultural Overuse of Antibiotics

Because antibiotic resistance is caused in part by overuse of antibiotics in agriculture, health care food systems can help by establishing a procurement policy under which they seek to purchase meat, poultry, dairy, and seafood products produced with fewer antibiotics.

Farmers' Markets on Hospital Grounds

Increasingly, hospitals are demonstrating leadership in health promotion by hosting farmers' markets and farm stands on site as a way to make farm fresh, locally grown produce and other foods more readily available. Hospital-based farmers' markets are one way for hospitals to help realize a number of health goals related to patients, staff and their community.

A Purchasing Guide to Sourcing Dairy Products Produced Without rBGH

A short guide with background, sample letter, and survey to help assess your dairy supply.

Health Care Without Harm Position Statement on rBGH

This document includes background and scientific rationale for position opposing the use of rBGH.

Health Care Case Studies and Reports

"Farm to Hospital: Promoting Health and Supporting Local Agriculture." 2004. by the Center for Food and Justice. Seven case studies highlight hospitals that have incorporated farm to hospital program components, including local food purchasing, hosting on-site farmers' markets, and establishing community gardens.

Healthy Food, Healthy Hospitals, Healthy Communities
May 2005 report by Institute for Agriculture and Trade

Policy's Food and Health Program documenting stories of health care leaders bringing fresher, healthier food choices to their patients, staff, and communities.

Cultivating Common Ground: Linking Health and Sustainable Agriculture

Sustainable agriculture practices are rarely seen as viable solutions for improving nutrition and health. In this report by the Prevention Institute we learn compelling reasons to link sustainable agriculture and health sectors.

Does It Have Artificial Hormones? Know Your Milk

An excellent eight page educational overview booklet with references produced by HCWH member organization Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility. Also available at <http://oregonpsr.org/csf/BrochureFinal.pdf>.

Other Reading and Resources

Civic Agriculture: Reconnecting Farm, Food, and Community.

Thomas A. Lyson, University Press of New England, 2004. Explains how we got to where we are now with industrial, globalized agriculture, and how we might find our way back to more wholesome food through the civic agriculture movement.

The Hunger and Environmental Nutrition Dietetic Practice Group

promotes optimal nutrition and well-being for all people, now and in the future, acknowledging the interdependence of food and water security, health, agriculture and the environment. <http://www.hendpg.org>.

Journal of Hunger & Environmental Nutrition

This peer-reviewed professional quarterly examines factors that govern how people produce, procure, and consume food and the implications for nutrition and health. It examines hunger and environmental nutrition issues including sustainable food systems, poverty, social justice, and human values. <http://www.haworthpress.com/web/JHEN/>.

National Catholic Rural Life Conference

NCRLC is a partner with many diverse organizations around the country united by the common vision of a more sustainable agriculture and food system for the United States. <http://www.ncrlc.com/Agric-and-Food-Issues.html>.



Without Harm

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