

# He Milks Camels In Colorado

How long does it take to milk a camel? About 90 seconds, says Kyle Hendrix. That's the amount of time it takes the camel to devour a pound of grain and chomp down the hay Hendrix bribes her with. After that she holds her milk back, and Hendrix disconnects the milk machine. He then lets the camel's calf – which “primed” the camel before milking – finish the job.

Why would anyone want to milk a camel? Opportunity, says Hendrix, a 27-year-old beginning farmer, who found it financially impossible to operate a traditional cattle dairy with high feed and rent costs in 2010-2011. On a trip to attend a dairy show he stopped at Passow's Camel Farm in Perry, Okla., and visited with camel breeder Ralph Passow.

With only 3,000 camels in the U.S. and growing demand from immigrants for the milk, Hendrix decided to plunge into the niche market; in addition to managing his father's 600-head beef cow herd and feedlot.

Hendrix currently has three cow/calf camel pairs and a bull.

While he was the first to start a camel dairy in Colorado, there are other camel dairies run by the Amish in Michigan, Pennsylvania and Missouri as well as a couple of dairies

in California and Oklahoma.

Some people who can't tolerate cow's milk can drink camel's milk because of its lower lactose content. It's low fat, low-protein and tastes like cow's milk, only a little sweeter, Hendrix says. Health-wise, many consider just small amounts to be helpful for diabetics because of its high insulin content. Others claim its high level of nutrients and antibodies improve autism symptoms and help fight cancer and a variety of other health problems. The milk sells for as much as \$80/gal. Hendrix's camels give him 1 1/2 to 2 gal. of milk each day (in two milkings with typical dairy cow milking equipment).

Currently he sells shares (whole, half and quarter increments) for raw milk to customers in Colorado. One share is worth 4 gal. a month. Any milk not sold is used by his wife, Holly, to make soap, which is also known for its healthful properties. Hendrix's goal is to build a processing plant so he can pasteurize the milk and sell it anywhere in the country.

Developing a camel herd is challenging. Camel calves cost \$4,000 to \$8,000. The females don't breed until they are 3 or 4 years old (bulls are 5 or 6). Gestation is 13 months, and a calf must stay with its mother for her to produce milk.



**“It's something different and unique. I think the market will take off for camel milk,” says Kyle Hendrix, who recently started a camel dairy in Colorado.**

On the positive side, camels live 30 to 40 years.

Camels are easy keepers on brome grass hay and eat noxious weeds and cactus. By law, Hendrix fences them in with a 6-ft. perimeter fence and a second fence.

“The biggest thing is they have to be wormed every two months,” he says. “But they're easy going. You just have to treat them nice. They have a good memory. It takes me about 4 days to break them in to get them in the stall to milk them,” he says.

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# First-Of-Its-Kind Purple Sweet Corn

Munk Bergin's purple sweet corn is like no other. The Soltera Morado kernels are good to eat whole or as corn meal. The silk has medicinal uses. The cobs can be processed for a rich purple dye, and even the baby cobs and husks can be used.

“We harvest the silk early, and the workers who pick it eat the baby cobs like you would cucumbers or they can be used in a stir fry,” says Bergin. “You can put the husks in a pitcher of water and steep them for sun tea. Pour off the tea and sweeten it with honey. It's such a refreshing and energizing drink that I dilute it.”

Bergin spent four years working with researchers investigating nutrient density levels in heirloom varieties. He explains that because all the plant components are a deep purple color, the corn is loaded with antioxidants. They have health benefits for people as well. Bergin believes it has at least 4 times and perhaps as much as 20 times the anthocyanins as blueberries.

“The color gets even deeper when the corn is cooked,” he says. “The deep colors have an impact on taste. These rich, dense colors accentuate the flavor you experience.”

Bergin says the amazing Soltera Morado resulted from crossing open pollinated corn

lines he has been breeding for more than 30 years. He first crossed various red cob and white cob flour and sweet corn lines to develop a red sweet corn he calls Blood Brothers. Then in 2002, he crossed Blood Brothers (male) with Martian Red, a sweet corn with purple cobs.

“Two years later I found 5 purple plants in a 3-acre field of Blood Brothers,” recalls Bergin. “From 2005 until 2008, I grew the purple plant seeds in isolation. I called them Purple Sage.”

In 2009, he crossed them to Double Red, and Soltera Morado was the result. Since then he has been growing the seeds out, increasing his population and trying to further purify both Blood Brothers and Soltera Morado for red and purple traits respectively.

“I plan to start contracting with growers to produce the seed for me next year,” he says. “I have some contracted this year.”

Bergin is very excited about the unique purple corn. He says nutraceutical companies are also very interested. However, he hopes to keep the seed out of commercial, corporate hands.

“I hope to put it in the hands of market gardeners and small growers,” says Bergin. “It has an old-time corn flavor that is not



**Munk Bergin is excited about his unique Soltera Morado purple corn. “I hope to put it in the hands of market gardeners and small growers. It has an old-time corn flavor that isn't sugar enhanced,” he says.**



**Small amounts of the seed are currently available. The kernels are good to eat whole or can be made into cornmeal.**

Bergin says small amounts of the Soltera Morado seed are currently available at about \$40/lb. Blood Brothers is priced at \$30/lb. Eventually the price likely will drop, but for the near term, it has to be grown in small lots in isolation from hybrid corn.

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