

Did Coke-owned Fairlife premium milk deceive public?

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Image credit: Getty Images

Fairlife, a premium milk brand owned by Coca-Cola, faces a class-action lawsuit alleging its suppliers abuse cows, contradicting the brand's claims of animal welfare and sustainability. Fairlife asserts on its website that it partners with farms committed to well-cared-for cows and reducing environmental impact.

Two Arizona farms that supplied milk to the \$1 billion brand are also named in the lawsuit. In a statement, Fairlife said it has "zero tolerance for animal abuse" and noted that its Arizona supplier has suspended milk deliveries from these facilities to all customers.

Watch the video above as Straight Arrow News contributor Adrienne Lawrence argues that, if these allegations are true, Fairlife is betraying consumers' trust. Lawrence argues that customers may be paying a premium for a product under allegedly false pretenses and offers suggestions on how they can take action.

Be the first to know when Adrienne Lawrence publishes a new commentary every Wednesday! Download the Straight Arrow News app and follow Adrienne to receive push notifications.

The following is an excerpt from the above video:

So how do we respond effectively? Well, we vote with our dollars. Look for third-party certifications, like Animal Welfare Approved or Certified Humane. These labels are not perfect, no, but they offer more accountability than corporate self-policing.

Second, consider some alternatives to conventional dairy. I'm sure it's cheaper. According to the National Institutes of Health, people who consume plant-based diets tend to live longer and healthier lives. Studies have shown that a well-planned plant-based diet can reduce the risk of heart disease, high blood pressure and also type two diabetes.

And finally, demand stronger consumer protection laws. Contact your representatives and also insist that companies that are making ethical claims face rigorous verification requirements and substantial consequences for violations. If a company claims to be ethical, it should be legally required to prove it through independent audits and public transparency in its reports.

Fairlife sells its milk with a premium because it promises something better, but if these allegations prove true, then what we're really paying for is a carefully crafted illusion, and that should concern every consumer who believes that their choices matter.

Transcript

LET'S BE HONEST, BUYING GROCERIES HAS BECOME A FINANCIAL BURDEN FOR MOST OF US, THE PRICE OF MILK ALONE HAS SKYROCKETED, AND FOR MANY CONSUMERS OUT THERE, THE DECISION TO PAY EXTRA FOR ETHICALLY SOURCED DAIRY IS A MATTER OF BOTH PRINCIPLE AND ONE OF TRUST, FAIR LIFE. A BRAND OWNED BY COCA COLA HAS BUILT ITS ENTIRE BUSINESS ON THAT TRUST, CHARGING A PREMIUM FOR MILK THAT MARKETS AS SUPERIOR, HUMANE AND SUSTAINABLE.

BUT A NEWLY FILED CLASS ACTION LAWSUIT ALLEGES THAT FAIR LIFE'S PREMIUM PRICE TAG ISN'T FUNDING BETTER TREATMENT FOR COWS OR BETTER ENVIRONMENTAL PRACTICES. IT'S ALLEGEDLY FUNDING DECEPTION. ACCORDING TO THE COMPLAINT, THE COMPANY'S DAIRY SUPPLY CHAIN HAS BEEN PLAGUED BY, QUOTE, THE WORST, MOST WIDESPREAD, EGREGIOUS, SYSTEMIC, FREQUENT AND EXTREME CRUELTY AND NEGLECT. YET DESPITE ITS REPEATED CLAIMS THAT ANIMAL WELFARE IS A TOP PRIORITY. THESE ALLEGATIONS AREN'T JUST ABOUT MARKETING PUFFERY. THEY'RE ABOUT CONSUMERS BEING ASKED TO PAY MORE FOR A PRODUCT UNDER ALLEGEDLY FALSE PRETENSES, AND THEY'RE ABOUT A PATTERN OF BEHAVIOR. WHY? BECAUSE THIS IS NOT THE FIRST TIME THAT FAIR LIFE HAS BEEN ACCUSED OF MISLEADING THE PUBLIC TO GARNER SOME SALES IN 2019 AN UNDERCOVER INVESTIGATION REVEALED DISTURBING TREATMENT OF ANIMALS AT ITS SUPPLIER FARMS, WHICH LED TO A \$21 MILLION SETTLEMENT.

THE COMPANY RESPONDED WITH PROMISES OF REFORM, BUT ACCORDING TO THIS NEW LAWSUIT, THE CRUELTY NEVER STOPPED SOME OF THE ALLEGATIONS WHILE THEY ARE DIFFICULT TO STOMACH. THE LAWSUIT DESCRIBES VIDEO EVIDENCE ALLEGEDLY SHOWING COWS BEING WHIPPED, STABBED WITH SCREWDRIVERS AND DENIED FOOD, WATER AND MEDICAL CARE. IN ONE PARTICULARLY GRUESOME ACCOUNT, A MANAGER IS ALLEGED TO HAVE SHOT A COW IN THE HEAD AND THEN, WHEN ASKED IF HE HAD FELT ANY REMORSE AT ALL? THE MAN RESPONDS, NO, IT'S WHY I LIVE IN THIS COUNTRY, SO I CAN KILL THESE ASSHOLE COWS. AND YET, FAIR LIFE CONTINUES TO MARKET ITSELF AS A BRAND THAT TREATS ITS ANIMALS WITH GREAT CARE. ACCORDING TO THE COMPLAINT ALSO WELL, THE COMPANY GOES SO FAR AS TO CLAIM THAT 100% OF SUPPLYING FARMS PASSED CRITICAL CARE STANDARDS IN 2022 BUT IF THOSE ALLEGATIONS ARE TRUE, WELL, WHAT DOES THAT SAY ABOUT THOSE SO CALLED CRITICAL CARE STANDARDS? YOU KNOW, THIS ISN'T JUST ABOUT ANIMAL SUFFERING. THERE'S A DIRECT IMPACT ON HUMAN HEALTH TOO. STUDIES HAVE SHOWN THAT STRESSED AND ABUSED ANIMALS PRODUCE LOWER QUALITY MILK AND MEAT. THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION WARNS THAT ANIMALS SUBJECTED TO EXTREME STRESS AND MALNUTRITION ARE MORE LIKELY TO HARBOR DANGEROUS BACTERIA, INCREASING THE RISK OF FOOD BORNE ILLNESSES AND ACCORDING TO THE CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION FOOD BORNE PATHOGENS LIKE E COLI AND SALMONELLA CALLS OVER 48 MILLION ILLNESSES AND 3000 DEATHS PER YEAR IN THE UNITED STATES. IF THESE ALLEGATIONS ARE TRUE, FAIR LIFE SUPPLY CHAIN MAY NOT JUST BE HARMING ANIMALS, IT MAY BE COMPROMISING THE SAFETY OF FOOD THAT IT SELLS TO MILLIONS OF CONSUMERS LIKE YOU AND ME.

MEANWHILE, COCA COLA, FAIR LIFE'S PARENT COMPANY, REPORTED OVER 45 BILLION IN REVENUE IN 2023 COMPARE THAT TO THE \$21 MILLION SETTLEMENT FROM 2019 AND IT IS CLEAR, EVEN IF FAIR LIFE LOSES THIS LAWSUIT, ANY FINANCIAL PENALTY, PENALTY WOULD BE A LITTLE MORE THAN A ROUNDING ERROR FOR COCA COLA. YOU KNOW, WE, THE PEOPLE, DESERVE BETTER THAN WATCHING CORPORATIONS TREAT ETHICAL VIOLATIONS AS MERELY THE COST OF DOING BUSINESS. AND YOU KNOW WHAT THE MOST FRUSTRATING PART IS, COMPANIES LIKE FAIR LIFE CAPITALIZE ON OUR VALUES TO EXTRACT MORE MONEY FROM OUR WALLETS WHEN CONSUMERS BUY ETHICALLY LABELED PRODUCTS, THEY ARE DOING SO BECAUSE THEY WANT TO DO WHAT'S RIGHT. THEY BELIEVE IN HUMANE TREATMENT OF ANIMALS, AND THEY WANT TO SUPPORT SUSTAINABLE FARMING PRACTICES. BUT WHEN BRANDS ALLEGEDLY DECEIVE CONSUMERS LIKE THIS, THEY'RE NOT JUST TAKING OUR MONEY, THEY'RE ALSO BETRAYING OUR TRUST AND OUR HUMANITY. SO HOW DO WE RESPOND EFFECTIVELY? WELL, WE VOTE WITH OUR DOLLARS. LOOK FOR THIRD PARTY CERTIFICATIONS, LIKE ANIMAL WELFARE APPROVED OR CERTIFIED HUMANE. THESE LABELS ARE NOT PERFECT, NO, BUT THEY OFFER MORE ACCOUNTABILITY THAN CORPORATE SELF

POLICING. SECOND, CONSIDER SOME ALTERNATIVES TO CONVENTIONAL DAIRY. I'M SURE IT'S CHEAPER.

ACCORDING TO THE NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH, PEOPLE WHO CONSUME PLANT BASED DIETS TEND TO LIVE LONGER AND HEALTHIER LIVES. STUDIES HAVE SHOWN THAT A WELL PLANNED PLANT BASED DIET CAN REDUCE THE RISK OF HEART DISEASE, HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE AND ALSO TYPE TWO DIABETES, AND FINALLY, DEMAND STRONGER CONSUMER PROTECTION LAWS. CONTACT YOUR REPRESENTATIVES AND ALSO INSIST THAT COMPANIES THAT ARE MAKING ETHICAL CLAIMS FACE RIGOROUS VERIFICATION REQUIREMENTS AND SUBSTANTIAL CONSEQUENCES FOR VIOLATIONS. IF A COMPANY CLAIMS TO BE ETHICAL, IT SHOULD BE LEGALLY REQUIRED TO PROVE IT THROUGH INDEPENDENT AUDITS AND PUBLIC TRANSPARENCY IN ITS REPORTS, FAIR LIFE SELLS ITS MILK WITH A PREMIUM BECAUSE IT PROMISES SOMETHING BETTER, BUT IF THESE ALLEGATIONS PROVE TRUE, THEN WHAT WE'RE REALLY PAYING FOR IS A CAREFULLY CRAFTED ILLUSION, AND THAT SHOULD CONCERN EVERY CONSUMER WHO BELIEVES THAT THEIR CHOICES MATTER.