

Dietitian: Kindness Starts On Kids' Plates

From [Mothers Against Dairy](#)

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I've been an ethical vegan for about a decade and a half, so I have held strong beliefs about the dairy industry for quite some time. What happens to mother and baby cows in the dairy industry is absolutely vile and heart wrenching. I didn't think I could feel more strongly about this topic, but that all changed when I had a baby of my own whom I have had the pleasure of breastfeeding.

I want to share this with you because I don't think you need to be vegan to understand that the connection between mother and baby is exceptionally special and powerful and that any rupture to this relationship can be extremely traumatic.

And once we have this "a-ha" realization that mother-baby relationships across species really aren't that different, we can empathize. And with empathy comes compassion.

Cows and Their Babies

First let's get clear on what it's like for cows to exist "naturally." I put that in quotes because, what does that word even mean anymore? What I mean here is how cows behave when they aren't being farmed by humans.

Cows are mammals, just like us. It's news to many folks that cows aren't some magical milk machines put on this planet to give us plentiful milk. The reality is, just like humans, cows only lactate when they're pregnant or nursing their babies.

It's not complicated – cows mate, get pregnant, birth their babies and nurse their babies. In the "wild," and in sanctuaries, baby cows stay with their mothers for life! It's unnatural for mother and baby cows to be separated.



Mother cows bellow and cry as their newborn babies are stolen. Despite carrying them for nine months just like humans do, mother cows on dairy farms have their babies torn from them shortly after birth, and will never see them again. Instead, the milk they make for their babies will be sold to humans who have no need to consume it. © Karolina Kase

What Happens to Mother and Baby Cows in the Dairy Industry

In the dairy industry, female cows are artificially inseminated to become pregnant so that they lactate and humans can take their milk.

Once female cows birth their babies, the babies are taken from them within 24 hours. Can you imagine? Research shows that baby cows who are separated from their mothers are more stressed. Well, obviously! We don't need research to know that.

It's been said by countless people who have witnessed this tearing apart that the mom will bellow after her baby and attempt to chase the person or vehicle hauling away her baby. I would do the same, wouldn't you?

Meanwhile, the baby cows search desperately for their mothers.

Rather than nursing from their mother, the baby cow is fed through an artificial system. And the mother cow is hooked up to machines that take her milk so that it can be sold for profit. Rather than letting mother and baby be together as they should, we traumatically separate them and then exploit their bodies for profit.

It doesn't stop there. After the mother cow has been depleted from the machines stealing her milk that was meant for her baby, she is no longer profitable to the dairy industry. And so, she is sent to slaughter where she is to be killed and her flesh ripped from her body, as every part of her is exploited and used for human profit. Because that's all she ever was to the animal agriculture industry: a commodity. Not a life. Not an individual. Not a mother.

And what ever happened to that baby cow?

According to [Lizz Truitt](#), Marketing & Communications Director at Woodstock Farm Sanctuary and mother to a vegan baby, “If the calves are male, they are either killed quickly to be sold as cheap meat, considered worthless and neglected until malnourishment and death, or sold at auction to be slaughtered.”

“If the calves are female, and the farm operators consider them ‘worthy enough’ to produce milk for them, they will be put into the same lifecycle as their mothers – milk-making machines, forcibly impregnated over and over, no connection to their babies, and then sent to slaughter when they are ‘spent’ and not producing enough milk anymore,” Truitt explains. “If the female baby is born with any ailments or is sick, she will be killed immediately.”

The Mother-Child Bond is Powerful Across Species

Have you had the opportunity to witness mother-baby relationships among non-human animals?

Just like in humans, the mother-child connection among animals we typically think of as “farm animals” is special.



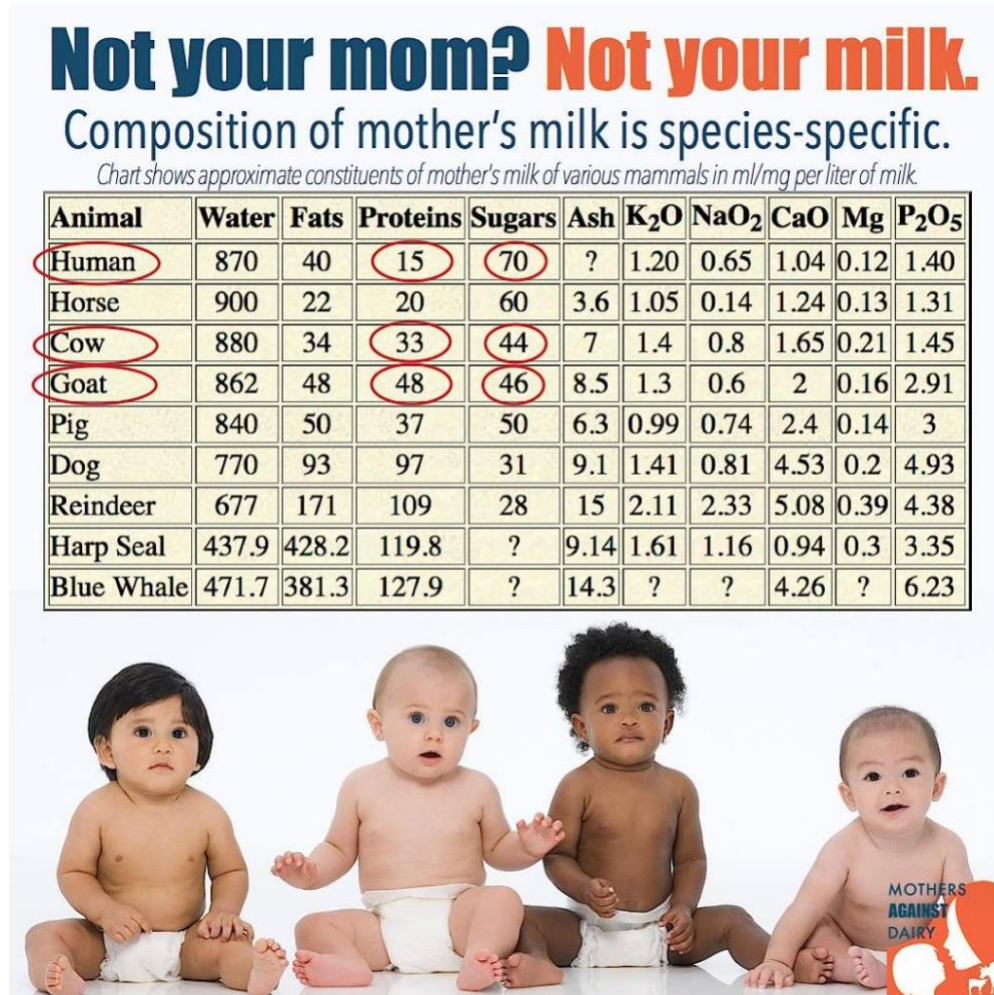
“Despite what many people might believe about farmed animals, they are sentient individuals who feel the same emotions we do,” Truitt says.

“They experience fear, joy, love, heartbreak, friendships, and family. When a goat, sheep, pig, or cow experiences pregnancy, their body is instinctually preparing them to mother, just like us. So when they carry their babies for their pregnancy term and go through labor and birth, they are ready to bond and love their children. In animal agriculture, in dairy, they don’t get that chance. Their bodies are considered commodities and their maternal instincts are robbed of them.”

Farmed animals want to maintain the bond with their babies just like we do. The dairy industry is based on breaking that bond. Their entire bottom line is dependent on severing ties between mother and baby.

How to Align Our Actions with Our Values

When you think of how you want to treat animals, does that align with what you actually do? I'm not just talking about being nice to cats, dogs and other animals we consider pets. Take a long hard look at your consumer choices and who is impacted by them.



It can be easy to ignore where things come from when we buy them in colorful packaging in fluorescent-lit stores. But that doesn't change the reality that foods derived from animals always contain the ingredients of cruelty and exploitation.

One thing I haven't mentioned yet is that I'm a registered dietitian. And I can tell you with 100% certainty that humans do not need milk from another species. It's meant for baby cows. The only time humans need milk is when we are babies and growing infants, and the milk we need comes from human mothers.

If you're used to drinking cow milk, soy milk is an excellent replacement. Calcium-fortified soy milk delivers just as much, and often more, calcium as cow milk. And it's a great source of protein too. There are lots of other plant milks on the market, made from foods such as almonds, cashews, oats, coconuts and more.

Beyond liquid milk, there are plentiful delicious plant-based alternatives for other forms of dairy such as cheese, yogurt, cream cheese, butter and ice cream. These foods are available in most large grocers and big box stores. Even discount stores carry many of these foods!

It's easier today than ever to eat tasty, nourishing foods while minimizing harm to animals. Curious what this looks like? I put together a list of [25 quick and easy vegan meals and snacks](#).

Worried about getting enough calcium without dairy products? [I explain exactly how you can meet your calcium needs without dairy!](#)

Cultivating Compassion for Future Generations

If you're reading this because you're pregnant or have babies or children of your own, you've undoubtedly considered what kind of parent you want to be and what kinds of humans you want to raise.



Notice how kids naturally relate to animals. Oftentimes it's with kindness, joy, love and glee. Somewhere along the line we're socialized to continue treating certain animals (like dogs and cats) that way while we're conditioned to believe that other animals (like cows and pigs) are OK for us to use, abuse, kill and eat.

You can help your children maintain their innate kindness by teaching them about compassion toward all species.

Consider researching farm animal sanctuaries in your area and visiting them as a family. Give your children the opportunity to interact with animals and learn about their rescue stories. There are also numerous [children's books](#) that deliver these messages in age-appropriate ways.

When we know better, we can do better. And don't our children deserve better?

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