



# Will pay for rjSP

by Fidelis Zvomuya

According to a recent survey, South African milk consumers are prepared to pay more for a non-existent rsJP free milk, but not for milk that is recombinant bovine somatotropin (rbST) free. rjSP was an additive created only for the survey and is non-existent in milk products.

This milk consumer survey, commissioned by Elanco Animal Health and carried out by Ipsos Forward Research last year, concludes that there is very little understanding on rbST among dairy consumers.

"The survey showed that there is significant confusion and a lack of knowledge as to what the difference between organic, hormone free, probiotic and rbST free milk is. Of the 300 respondents that we surveyed, 10% say they will pay significantly more for rjSP free milk as opposed to 9% who are willing to pay more for rbST free milk," says Lynne Hobson-Jones, Elanco corporate affairs manager.

"Very few people surveyed mention hormones or rbST as factors in their purchasing decision. Few of the consumers agreed that they knew the meaning of rbST free, and within that group the majority was still incorrect when aided. Consumers are more concerned about antibiotics," the survey states.

The survey was undertaken telephonically between June and August of last year, sampling dairy consumers in Cape Town, Durban, Johannesburg, Soweto, Pretoria, Vaal, the East and West Rand.

## Why the debate?

Bovine somatotropin, also known as bovine growth hormone, or BGH, is a protein hormone that is naturally occurring in cattle and plays a role in the growth and development of the organism. Since 1994 it has been possible to synthesise this hormone using recombinant DNA technology to create rbST, recombinant bovine growth hormone (rBGH), an artificial growth hormone. When rbST is injected into cows, their digestive systems become more efficient at converting feed to milk.

The use of the rbST growth hormone in dairy cattle was approved as safe by the USA FDA as early as 1994 and dairy farmers all over the world, including South Africa, have used it to boost milk production.

Proponents of the use of rbST see efforts by biotechnology opponents to portray rbST as untested or harmful and to discourage its use, as actions that keep society from taking full advantage of a safe and useful product, while keeping the price of milk unnecessarily high.

Although many consumer activists and the media have stated that the drug was a threat to the health of people and cows, and it was thought that the use of rbST in milk production was a determining factor in consumers' purchasing decisions, the survey has now shown that most South Africans buy milk based on price, expiry date, quality and taste.

According to the research, the public's perception that cow milk is laced with dangerous hormones such as rbST is not an issue.

"It is not a consumer issue, it is an industry issue and a marketing tag line," the survey says.

Dawie Pretorius, Elanco director, says traces of bST are found in all milk, even milk from cows that are not treated with rbST. "Keep in mind that the hormone bST in cows' milk will be digested and thus made harmless to humans," he says.

"It is very important to differentiate between a hormone like bST, which consists of digestible amino acids, and other hormones like oestrogen, progesterone and anabolic steroids that are directly absorbed into the human body and will cause hormone-related effects in our bodies."

### Other findings

Of the 300 surveyed consumers, 63% said they purchase Clover milk products, followed by 13% preferring Dairybelle and 11% opting for Parmalat. In addition, Pick n Pay was found the most dominant shop outlet for milk consumers with 42% saying they get their milk from this retail chain store.

"Consumers generally purchase the same type or brand of milk, indicating that milk purchasing is a habit," Lynne says. "Price came out as the top factor in most consumers' purchasing decisions with 30%, freshness coming second with 29%, quality third at 14%. Hormone or rbST use, as well as organic were of very little or no concern to most consumers and only counted for 1% as a decision factor," Lynne says. **M&J**

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