

# Big changes down at the farm

■ *Kwanchai Rungfapaisarn*  
*The Nation*

AFTER A CONSERVATIVE approach for the past 15 years, the Farm Chokchai Group yesterday announced a major business diversification with its new retail dairy shop and fast-food restaurant.

A new "Umm! Milk" dairy shop was officially launched to sell home-made ice cream and other dairy goods, such as pasteurised and low-fat milk, yoghurt and milk candies.

Next year the group will launch its restaurant chain for selling such premium fast-food products as hamburgers, hot dogs, meatballs, French fries and bakery products.

The new retail and fast-food restaurant businesses have been developed to expand an operation that has concentrated on fresh milk production.

Almost 80 per cent of fresh milk is supplied to independent producers of dairy products. The diversification will help the group use all of its products.

Managing director Choak Bulakul said that the group currently allocated only 20 per cent of its fresh milk to make dairy products under its "Umm! Milk" brand.

"We would like to convert the largest proportion of our fresh milk to our dairy goods. In addition to home-made ice cream, pasteurised milk, yoghurt and milk candy, we also plan to launch new dairy products like cheese and other kinds of drinking milk in the near future," said Choak.

Farm Chokchai is the largest and most efficient dairy farm in Southeast Asia.

Occupying more than 20,000 rai of land in Nakhon Ratchasima's Pak Chong district, the farm's

dairy herd numbers about 5,000 head of cattle.

About 2,000 of the herd are milking cows that produce an average of 18 litres for a grand total of about 30 tonnes of fresh milk a day. The remaining 3,000 consist of calves, yearlings, heifers and pregnant heifers. The latter are for sale or export.

The farm is also the first to breed dairy cattle for export, sending to neighbouring countries, including Malaysia and Vietnam, as many as 500 annually. The farm will next year expand its export markets to Indonesia, China and the Philippines.

The first four "Umm! Milk" outlets have been opened in the Chokchai Steak House in Rangsit, Chokchai Prime Steak House in Sukhumvit Soi 23, Tops Supermarket in the Silom Complex and CentralWorld.

Two more standalone "Umm! Milk" dairy shops will be opened next year, costing Bt2.5 million each.

"Today, almost 50 per cent of our revenues are from our farm and related businesses, such as agro-tourism, while another 20 per cent come from our Chokchai Steak House restaurants," said Choak, adding that the company had also developed a factory complex for rent, which had made up 30 per cent of revenues.

He said Farm Chokchai attracted more than 300,000 tourists annually. Average spending has risen from Bt300 in 2000 to about Bt1,200 today.

"We expect our new diversified retail business for dairy products to grow 20 per cent per annum and contribute more than Bt100 million in sales in the next two years, accounting for almost 25 per cent of our farming business," said Choak.

Choak said that the group last year achieved revenues of Bt2.3 billion. It expects its net profit this year to grow 75 per cent from last year.



CHOAK:  
*We plan to launch new dairy products such as cheese.*