

## **Sawbones 579: Milk, Part 2 – Government Cheese**

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**Clint:** Sawbones is a show about medical history, and nothing the hosts say should be taken as medical advice or opinion. It's for fun. Can't you just have fun for an hour and not try to diagnose your mystery boil? We think you've earned it. Just sit back, relax, and enjoy a moment of distraction from that weird growth. You're worth it!

["Medicines" by The Taxpayers plays]

**Justin:** Hello, everybody, and welcome to Sawbones! A marital tour of misguided medicine. I'm your co-host, Justin McElroy!

**Sydnee:** And I'm Sydnee McElroy.

**Justin:** There's no time to waste, Sydnee, because the Max Fun Drive is coming around the bend into its final week. It's our last chance for us to ask people, hey, will you support us?

**Sydnee:** Yes.

**Justin:** Do you like what we do?

**Sydnee:** Yeah, if you like the stuff we make, not just on Sawbones, on our whole network—

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** This is the time to become a member and pledge a regular donation to our network, to help us out! We really appreciate it.

**Justin:** Yeah, for just five bucks a month, you can support Sawbones and a lot of other great shows, and you'll get some gifts in return. So, we'll tell you more about that during the break. But until then, the address is [maximumfun.org/join](http://maximumfun.org/join). Syd, last week, we talked about lac-

**Sydnee:** Milk.

**Justin:** Milk. Lactose.

**Sydnee:** Yeah, not just milk, but—

**Justin:** Milk—

**Sydnee:** We did talk a lot about—

**Justin:** Lactose in—not lactose intolerance, what are we calling it now?

**Sydnee:** Lactase persistence.

**Justin:** Lactase persistence.

**Sydnee:** Yes. You have the enzyme to break down lactose into adulthood, which the majority of humans on Earth do not, which means you can tolerate milk. Because as a reminder, the majority of humans on Earth do not have the enzyme, as adults, to break down milk.

**Justin:** Okay. I'm going to tell you about—I'm going to tell you about our history with milk. And it's not—this is not going to be like a normal Sawbones history, because it is, honestly... it's a wild story, Sydnee. I know a lot of Sawbones stories are wild, but this one, it just doesn't make a lot of sense. [chuckles] So, let me—let me back up, okay? So, you could—you could start a lot of places with this history, but I want to talk about the DMI. Because I think the DMI is really fascinating.

**Sydnee:** And what is the DMI now?

**Justin:** The DMI is the Dairy Management Incorporated, but it goes way back, okay? So, it would take you back to 1915, around there, okay? So, there's a public health crisis, because we had an outbreak of foot and mouth disease. And everybody's freaking out about dairy, right?

**Sydnee:** Right.

**Justin:** Nobody wants to drink dairy. Everybody's freaked out about it.

**Sydnee:** Could I say, this is—I think we should clarify, I asked the question in our first part, why did humans drink milk if most of them were intolerant?

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** I think you're asking the question, why do humans continue to drink milk, and why is it so important? I think we're still answering this question.

**Justin:** We're still answering this question, right? We're answering it from another perspective, right.

**Sydnee:** Right. Like this is another spin on why do humans drink so much milk.

**Justin:** Imagine, dear listener, your role in this is—you have a role in this chain, and it is milk consumer. And that is really the only role you play in this grand chain here, right? You have to understand, you're just a part of the wheel, of the great wheel of milk. [chuckles]

**Sydnee:** So, you're taking us back to hand, foot and mouth disease outbreak—

**Justin:** Foot and mouth disease—

**Sydnee:** When are we?

**Justin:** It's foot and mouth disease. It's 1915.

**Sydnee:** And people don't like dairy—

**Justin:** People don't want to eat dairy.

**Sydnee:** Yes, got it.

**Justin:** So, we have the formation of the National Dairy Council. And it is in the NDC's language to protect the public's good image of dairy. So, the first thing that the NDC puts out is a pamphlet called "Milk, the Necessary Food for Growth and Health."

**Sydnee:** Now, why do they—why do they need people to drink dairy? Like who is paying for this?

**Justin:** The National Dairy Council was founded by dairy farmers and processors. So, this is not a government thing, this is a lobbying organization, right? In much the same way that a lot of lobbies, you know, you see like... what's a good example? Beef, it's what's for dinner, right?

**Sydnee:** Yeah.

**Justin:** So, that's the beef people.

**Sydnee:** And—

**Justin:** Why don't you eat beef? Pork, the other white meat! Uh-oh! There's the pig guys. [chuckles] They want you to eat pigs, that's the deal.

**Sydnee:** And it's like any other lobby, I think it's important to note that while whatever they're lobbying for could be good, bad, or indifferent, but their motivations are that they want to sell dairy products.

**Justin:** Yes, but—

**Sydnee:** So...

**Justin:** This is the NDC. This is not the DMI.

**Sydnee:** Okay.

**Justin:** The DMI is a different beast. The NDC is educating people. "Hey, milk's great. You know, you got to get out there. We're wild for milk." On the West Coast, the Dairy Council out there in California, a similar organization, just to give you an idea of what they're doing, they had a custom truck that

dairyman Clarence Michael began driving around with a live cow on board. He drove it around the Los Angeles area schools in this mobile dairy classroom, where he would show people, this is how we get milk. It still goes on today, they're still touring around, I guess, and showing people how the live cow gets milk.

**Sydnee:** Do they—do they milk it right there?

**Justin:** I assume, yes—

**Sydnee:** And then hand the milk to the children?

**Justin:** "Drink the raw milk, child."

**Sydnee:** See, that's—well, now, you can do that these days.

**Justin:** So, this is a—this is an educational outreach, right? That's like, "Hey, milk is great, and you should all be into milk." One of the biggest proponents of this was a chemist named Elmer McCollum. And Elmer McCollum is a nutritionist who, like a lot of people, is just kind of playing with half the information, you know what I mean? He's very into nutrition, but like literally everybody else in his time period, he doesn't have a full understanding of it, right?

**Sydnee:** Which is true for our time period now, I would say.

**Justin:** Mm-hm. When McCollum's mother became pregnant, he fell ill with scurvy.

**Sydnee:** Okay.

**Justin:** Okay? She weaned him on mashed potatoes and boiled milk, and he was slowly dying of scurvy. And then one day—this is—this is the anecdote, okay? One day while his mother was peeling apples, McCollum started to suck on the peels. On the following day, he felt a little better. She fed him more apple skins. When spring came, she gave him other fruits and vegetables, and he completely recovered from scurvy. But his teeth caused him trouble for the rest of his life. [chuckles]

**Sydnee:** Is there a lot of vitamin C in apple peels?

**Justin:** [chuckles] I don't know, man. This is the story! He coined these "protective foods," okay? And in McCollum's figuring, dairy was our all-around best food. And throughout this like work that he's pushing out, milk consumption goes up and people are like, "I guess milk's really important." McCollum also tries to tie and—it's where we see the first roots of deficiencies that are being drawn in populations. One of McCollum's foundational principles was that there's not dairy in the typical Chinese diet.

**Sydnee:** Mm-hm.

**Justin:** And the national character, whatever that means, of China suffers for it. Now what's—

**Sydnee:** Ooh.

**Justin:** Now it's interesting—

**Sydnee:** Uh-oh

**Justin:** No, no, it's interest—yes, right? Agreed. But I read an article by a Chinese historian who said that this idea actually got some traction in reformist Chinese circles, and actually produced an increase in milk consumption in China, to where it's now like a lot—like a lot, lot, lot more common. When COVID was happening, it was a huge deal that so many of the cows had COVID, like dairy's a big deal over there at this point. And it is largely, from what this historian was saying, you know, prompted by this push.

**Sydnee:** Which is interesting, considering from what we learned in the last episode, statistically, I would assume many Chinese people, if not most, cannot break down lactose.

**Justin:** That's really, really so important, Syd!

**Sydnee:** By the way, apple peels are a great source of vitamin C. So, there you go.

**Justin:** Thank you, Elmer.

**Sydnee:** I just found this out. I didn't know specifically the peel is a better source than the flesh.

**Justin:** So, that's about education, but that is also important because you can start to see how this is the basis of our idea that milk is like pure and natural. Because we're—it's very important for them to get that idea across.

**Sydnee:** Okay.

**Justin:** Because there's this fear about the disease, right? So, there's a push to say milk is clean and pure and good for you, and it's a superfood, right? So, to not drink milk becomes... what's the alternative, right? Impure.

**Sydnee:** Yeah.

**Justin:** Right? Yeah.

**Sydnee:** And unhealthy. Now, are we pre-pasteurization still at this point?

**Justin:** I'm not going to talk about pasteurization. That's about—

**Sydnee:** Oh?

**Justin:** That's about health. I'm not talking about health. I'm talking about marking. So, the problem becomes in 19—the 19<sup>th</sup>—listen, if you want answers about pasteurization, you should talk to Sydnee. She's kind of the pasteurization expert. Don't ask me science questions.

**Sydnee:** 1920, are we pre-1920? Still?

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** Okay, well, then we're pre-pasteurization.

**Justin:** Okay.

**Sydnee:** That's about—that was about our cut—all milk was not pasteurized after 1920, but that's when we—this is when things take off.

**Justin:** Okay. Do you know about government cheese?

**Sydnee:** From The West Wing.

**Justin:** Okay.

**Sydnee:** [laughs]

**Justin:** So, you're talking about the big block of cheese.

**Sydnee:** Yeah.

**Justin:** No. So, 1970s, we got a dairy shortage, okay? This is the—this is the ping pong of events. This is just like before, right? Where we—something kicked off with foot and mouth disease, and then, "Oh, no..." 1970s, there's a national dairy shortage.

**Sydnee:** Uh-oh.

**Justin:** Yes. Jimmy Carter says, "Farmers, produce more dairy. If you produce more dairy, the US will buy it. If you make too much, you can't sell it, we'll buy it. We'll be the customer. Just don't worry about having too much. We'll buy your surplus."

**Sydnee:** Okay. And do what with it?

**Justin:** Really, really interesting question, Syd! [chuckles] Because it ended up, we had by the '80s, 1.4 billion pounds of surplus cheese. Is actually that is the—what is there now, still.

**Sydnee:** Where is it?

**Justin:** Today. Hundreds of feet below the ground in Missouri.

**Sydnee:** No.

**Justin:** Yes.

**Sydnee:** It's all—I was kidding, it's all in one place?

**Justin:** Mm-hm. Yeah. It's a huge stockpile of perfectly preserved American cheese—not American cheese. I mean, it's American cheese in the sense that we bought it. So...

**Sydnee:** There's a giant bunker of cheese in Missouri?

**Justin:** Yup! So... 1981 is the year, we have all this extra, right? John Block, who's the Secretary of Agriculture, showed up at the White House with a five-pound block of cheese. And this is a quote, told reporters, "We got 60 million of these that the government owns, and it's moldy. It's deteriorating. We can't find a market for it. We can't sell it. And we're looking to give some of it away." [chuckles] And that's the beginning of government cheese!

**Sydnee:** Is it already moldy at this point?

**Justin:** So, no, this is—it is molding, right? They have the cheese, they gotta get rid of the cheese.

**Sydnee:** They gotta get rid of the cheese.

**Justin:** So, government cheese—here, you can see a picture of Reagan with the big five-pound block of government cheese. We're sending this out to everybody.

**Sydnee:** No one has ever looked as happy as Ronald Reagan looks holding that giant block of cheese.

**Justin:** So, we got these big blocks of cheese where—and this is like, we're shipping it out to all these different... like, it becomes a huge source of us sending food to different communities that are on like food stamps or whatever. So like, government cheese becomes almost sort of iconic. But it

is—it is an offshoot of the government, trying to balance our dairy production and dairy consumption.

**Sydnee:** So, they just send it to people for free. I've heard of government cheese, but I didn't know what—

**Justin:** That is the—

**Sydnee:** I didn't know exactly what you got.

**Justin:** That is the idea—

**Sydnee:** Like you just got—

**Justin:** It was sent—yes.

**Sydnee:** Sent a giant block of cheese.

**Justin:** Well, I mean, it wasn't—I mean, I assume different families got different amounts. But yes, it was sent cheese from the government stockpile. And it was famously not particularly appetizing.

**Sydnee:** Really?

**Justin:** Yes. So, we don't—

**Sydnee:** Cheddar? Do you think it's a sharp—

**Justin:** This is what...

**Sydnee:** American?

**Justin:** It is referenced in Kendrick Lamar and Jay-Z songs. And in 2017, Snoop Dogg taught Martha Stewart how to cook it on their show. So, the— when the government sees that we have too much cheese or too much dairy—

**Sydnee:** Right.

**Justin:** They have to step in and do something. And that is how the dairy management—

**Sydnee:** Eat it. [chuckles]

**Justin:** Yeah, they have to eat it all. This is how the dairy management incorporated—or the DMI was founded. It was absorbed—the NDC from before, the National Dairy Council, was absorbed by the DMI. And their educational curriculum was picked up by DMI. And DMI is... okay, this is—this is why. We've got to back up a little bit, to talk about the Dairy Production Stabilization Act of 1983! Whoow!

**Sydnee:** That's the year I was born.

**Justin:** Yes, well, guess what happened the year you were born? What time is it? Yeah, I got time to explain this—

**Sydnee:** Nothing as important as that.

**Justin:** Nothing as important as that! Okay... so, here's the Dairy Stabiliz—Protection Stabilization Act of 1983.

**Sydnee:** Okay.

**Justin:** Okay. What they said to anybody that wants to produce dairy in America is that per hundred weight of—on commercially marketed milk—I don't know what that is. Probably 100 pounds of milk? I don't know, 100 gallons? Whatever it is. Fif—

**Sydnee:** A liquid measurement.

**Justin:** 15 cents per that, right? Has to be given to the National Dairy Promotion and Research Board, which is the parent organiz—that is the DMI. And the USDA oversees the National Dairy Promotion and Research Board.

**Sydnee:** So, this is a government agency.

**Justin:** This is a government agency!

**Sydnee:** Mm-hm.

**Justin:** Right? That if you want to sell milk or make—if you want to make milk—

**Sydnee:** You have to give this percentage of your profits.

**Justin:** You wanna make milk in America, you have to pay some amount to the government, right?

**Sydnee:** Right.

**Justin:** The government, the dairy—the National Dairy Promotion and Research Board, there are 36 members of that board, different producers. And they are the ones that oversee these funds that get—that get paid in by everybody who produces dairy.

**Sydnee:** Mm-hm.

**Justin:** Right? You pay into this thing. And so you have DMI, so the DMI is charged with marketing milk, with getting milk out there, with getting people excited about milk.

**Sydnee:** So, the idea is that—the reason—if I am somebody who sells milk, the reason I would want to do this is that I take some of my money from selling milk and give it to you, and you're going to make more people buy my milk.

**Justin:** Yes. But this is the—this is the key thing about this relationship that you have to understand for the rest of this episode to make sense. Okay? This is overseen by the federal government.

**Sydnee:** Right.

**Justin:** Okay? So, there was a lawsuit, Johans versus Livestock Marketing Association, 2005, that clarified this. Supreme Court ruled that commodity

checkoff advertising is "government speech." So, when DMI runs a campaign like a marketing campaign or they do a partnership with a... well, when they do any of the things that we're about to talk about after this—

**Sydnee:** Mm-hm.

**Justin:** That is the government. That is the United States government who is sending out that message.

**Sydnee:** And they've declared milk a commodity in order to do that. Could they do it with other commodities? Like, can they do that with any commodity?

**Justin:** I mean, that's an interesting question, I don't know. They did it in 1983 because they said, "Listen, guys, we can't keep goofing around with this situation where you don't know how much milk to make, okay? So we're all going to work together and we're going to figure out how to balance this, so we're not constantly on this up and down." And a big part of it was, "Okay, we have to figure out how to market this, you know, together. So we're going to be—we're going to market it so we don't end up in the position of having to get this on the back—"

**Sydnee:** Does it limit the amount of dairy?

**Justin:** Hm?

**Sydnee:** Is the thought that because you have to pay some of your profits, you're also going to limit the amount of dairy available, so you don't have too much?

**Justin:** It is not about—it is not about control or supply, and that is so important!

**Sydnee:** I didn't know—

**Justin:** It is so important!

**Sydnee:** If it was like a cat share kind of situation.

**Justin:** No, no, it's not—it's not that because the—and this is—the supply of the milk is independent from that. You know what I mean?

**Sydnee:** Okay.

**Justin:** So it's like... I mean, it's not independent in that there's more... if they make more, there's more money to advertise milk, but there's not necessarily more demand for milk. Right? So like, they have to create the demand for the milk—

**Sydnee:** Got it.

**Justin:** That they produce. If more milk is produced, more money is allocated to marketing milk. And thus, they hope consumption increases. The perfect—

**Sydnee:** Which should drive production, but it sounds like it's—

**Justin:** The stat that the—

**Sydnee:** Backwards.

**Justin:** The stat that the DMI most recently floated, this was from Barbara O'Brien, the first woman to lead the DMI, said that for each dollar invested in the—in the fund, there—\$15.60 in dairy sales are generated. This is what they claim.

**Sydnee:** That's a—

**Justin:** Which I would say—

**Sydnee:** Great ROI.

**Justin:** If that's their ROI, let's put them in charge of other stuff. We're going to talk about the DMI and some of their fun stuff. But first, Syd, will you tell us about...

**Sydnee:** The Max Fun Drive!

**Justin:** Thank you.

**Sydnee:** That's right. This is—this is the time of year, once a year, all of us on the Max Fun Network come to you and say, hey, if you are listening, then you probably enjoy what we do. I hope so. I hope that's why you're listening. This is the time where we ask, could you throw a little bit of your hard-earned money our way to help us?

Help the creators on the network keep making the content that you enjoy, keep making the shows, make them better. As I've mentioned before, it helps me a lot because we do a research-based show, and I want to make sure that I'm giving you up to date information and a wide array of sources.

And there's so much stuff out there now that's behind a paywall, and it's hard to subscribe to every journal and every news source. So, it really helps me to be able to make better up to date content for you if you donate to our network, and donate to our show.

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** And right now during the Max Fun Drive, you can go and pick what shows you listen to, to make sure that the majority of the money you're donating goes directly to those creators that you like and that you want to keep listening to. We've got lots of different levels of donation.

You can start at \$5 a month, our most popular level. People love it because at five dollars a month, you get access to all of the bonus content from all the years, from all the shows, endless hours of bonus content. This year on our show, on Sawbones, we did a video where I give you a tour of my greenhouse.

**Justin:** Mm-hm, yes.

**Sydnee:** I know—listen, I promise you, it's more exciting than it sounds. It really is. There's so many plants growing in there and I've got decorations,

and I talk about how you can tell if you've watered enough. And I mean, it's—I've got lots of great tips, right?

**Justin:** Yes, it is fantastic. Very relaxing.

**Sydnee:** And I'm wearing my going out overalls, my special fancy overalls.

**Justin:** Your fancy overalls.

**Sydnee:** That's right. So, at \$5 a month, you get all that bonus content. At \$10 a month, you get all that bonus content, but you also get a really cool key chain, Max Fun exclusive. You can pick which one from any of the shows, any show on the network. You've got to check out the Sawbones one, it shows you all the stuff you shouldn't put in your ear! Not all.

**Justin:** Not all. That's impossible to make a comprehensive...

**Sydnee:** [titters] A selection of the items that you shouldn't put in your ear. But there are a lot of great key chains there. Go check out all the designs. You can pick which one you want along with the bonus content. And then there are higher levels, if you're in a position to go—to go to a higher level. If you want to upgrade this year to one of those, you get all those gifts as well. And we so appreciate that.

If you want to boost your donation by a couple of dollars, every little bit helps us and all the creators on our network, and all of the people who work for Max Fun, make the stuff that you like. And we so appreciate you. [Maximumfun.org/join](http://Maximumfun.org/join) is the—is the website. Go now. Do it while you're thinking about it. Don't wait, because you'll forget!

**Justin:** Yeah. Thank you so much. [Maximumfun.org/join](http://Maximumfun.org/join) is that address. Thank you. Thanks a lot. Okay, Syd?

**Sydnee:** Yes.

**Justin:** Are you ready to lose your mind about dairy?

**Sydnee:** [titters] I guess.

**Justin:** We found that—

**Sydnee:** I already did last week, so...

**Justin:** The DMI is the—is the U.S. government.

**Sydnee:** Okay.

**Justin:** Do you understand this?

**Sydnee:** I understand.

**Justin:** Okay, so—

**Sydnee:** It's the government. They're making us drink milk.

**Justin:** So—

**Sydnee:** They get money from us to make us drink milk.

**Justin:** Okay, so the first, probably most notable that a lot of people know the DMI's work from is Got Milk? That was an ad—actually, Rachel, we could probably play the audio of that ad. I think that's fair use. We'll listen to that. We'll come back.

[break]

[a phone rings]

**Speaker 1:** Mm-hm?

**Speaker 2:** Hello! For \$10,000—

**Speaker 1:** [mumbling]

**Speaker 2:** Excuse me?

**Speaker 1:** [mumbling]

**Speaker 2:** I'm afraid your time is almost up.

**Speaker 1:** [mumbling]

**Speaker 2:** I'm sorry! Maybe next time.

[disconnect tone]

**Speaker 1:** [mumbling]

**Speaker 3:** Got milk?

[break]

**Justin:** So, that ad, there's a guy eating a peanut butter sandwich and he can't get the milk. And everybody knew this ad in the '90s. It was a very famous ad. Directed by... Michael Bay. Also interesting, the voice on the radio is Rob Paulson, who did—who is like Yakko and did Raphael—

**Sydnee:** Oh? I didn't know that.

**Justin:** Anyway, that was huge. They also did the Milk Mustache ad. Can you tell people about that?

**Sydnee:** Yes. So, these were print ads. And basically, every celebrity who—from any realm, from sports, from music, from TV, all of your favorites of that era were doing these ads where it was just them with Got Milk across the top, and a milk mustache.

**Justin:** Yes.

**Sydnee:** Made the milk mustache not something to be embarrassed about, but even kind of like sexy.

**Justin:** Yeah, like a sexy—

**Sydnee:** "Ooh, look at my sexy milk mustache."

**Justin:** Yeah, kind of a sexy milk—milk—yeah, exactly. So, that was a—that's marketing. And that was a very big campaign from like—those two kind of dovetailed, actually, mid '90s to mid 2000s. Think about that. Two really big, national, big, notable campaigns for milk, like *iconic*.

**Sydnee:** Mm-hm.

**Justin:** Both DMI, both the U.S. government trying to get you to buy more milk.

**Sydnee:** But the DMI, I mean, my thought would be these—if it's a government agency, are tax dollars. But they're not, because they're—

**Justin:** But they're not.

**Sydnee:** They're profits from the dairy industry.

**Justin:** Right. And—

**Sydnee:** So, it's not tax money.

**Justin:** Right. And the more money that the—and the more dairy that the dairy industry makes, the more money the United States government has to spend to sell the dairy that it is being produced. [chuckles] Right? So—

**Sydnee:** "It's not our fault, it's a—[chuckles] we *have* to do this."

**Justin:** "We *have* to. Do you understand?" It—we—

**Sydnee:** It's like a Brewster's Millions kind of thing.

**Justin:** We know it's not—we also know that dairy farming, in a lot of ways is, at the scale that we're doing at, it's not great for the environment, right? But we have to sell all this milk that we have, right? So we have to keep marketing it.

**Sydnee:** But is anybody worried about that at this point? Is there—is there like a—

**Justin:** I think there's a lot of people worried—

**Sydnee:** Clash within the DMI?

**Justin:** About the environment, Syd.

**Sydnee:** Well, no, but I mean, within this specific government agency, is there... are there people there like wringing their hands like, "We have to stop! We don't want to do this, but we have to!"

**Justin:** Do you think there's anybody in any government agency currently in the year of our lord 2026 wringing their hands about any moral quandary whatsoever?

**Sydnee:** Yes.

**Justin:** All right! So, the—some other big ones, and these are the ones that I am really excited about, fast food partnerships.

**Sydnee:** Mm-hm.

**Justin:** Syd, do you remember when Taco Bell came out with the grilled cheese burrito, and it was a burrito—

**Sydnee:** Yes.

**Justin:** That had cheese on the outside, and cheese on the inside.

**Sydnee:** Yes.

**Justin:** That was a creation of the United States government. Look, I'm not lying. This is a picture.

**Sydnee:** [chuckles] "I'm not lying."

**Justin:** I'm not lying this time. This is a picture of a man named Mike. That says Mike. Of?

**Sydnee:** DMI.

**Justin:** At?

**Sydnee:** Taco Bell.

**Justin:** Taco Bell and McDonald's, the big—and they have people inside the kitchen working for them! There are DMI food scientists, researchers, nutritionists, culinary experts, who work for the United States government, DMI, that are inside the kitchens of Taco Bell and McDonald's, making cheesier ways of you to consume food, as a United States program to get you to eat more cheese.

**Sydnee:** You know what's weird too—

**Justin:** Not a joke.

**Sydnee:** Well, and as I think about it, how many places, if you get a kid's meal—

**Justin:** Yeah!

**Sydnee:** Do they have the option of milk? Like that's sort of the default, like with your happy meal or with whatever.

**Justin:** Yeah!

**Sydnee:** And I will say—I mean, like even like Chipotle has milk. And I will say that like my kids, if I am serving them lunch at home, they're never drinking milk with their lunch. That's never—I mean, we don't even think about it! Like there's not even the thought like, "Would you want milk with that?" But the fast-food restaurants like, "Well, obviously with that hamburger, you're going to want to drink some milk."

**Justin:** Right. Do you remember, Sydnee, when Domino's came out and they said, "Listen, our pizza has sucked for a really long time."

**Sydnee:** Right.

**Justin:** "But we're really sorry, and we're going to do better. We're going to—"

**Sydnee:** Well, and they did, to be fair. Domino's pizza is much better now.

**Justin:** They did. They did do better. Do you know how they—you know how they turned it around?

**Sydnee:** How?

**Justin:** Well...

**Sydnee:** You're probably going to say dairy.

**Justin:** The DMI partnered with Domino's to increase the amount of cheese, 40% more cheese, as a matter of fact, on their pizza. That's how they saved the Domino's cheese pizza, with a brand new recipe that had 40% more cheese.

**Sydnee:** Do you think I'm on a list somewhere because I order pizza without cheese quite frequently? And that there's like—like the Domino's people have to call the DMI and be like, "We're so sorry, boss. It's not our fault. There's just this one lady. There's just this one lady who keeps ordering pizza without cheese. And we're not—we're not advertising that, she just does it!"

**Justin:** Do you know—do you know why you probably know about Domino's great new pizza recipe? Because there was a 12 million dollar marketing campaign for the new pizza recipe. Do you know who paid for that marketing campaign?

**Sydnee:** The DMI.

**Justin:** Yeah. Yeah. It's just like—it's like—and then the sales rose by double digits. So it's like, yeah, it worked. Everybody loved it. At this same time, and this is from an exposé that a guy named Michael Moss wrote around this time in 2010. At the same time, the USDA was— [laughs] At the same time, the USDA was telling Americans that they should start asking for half the cheese, because the amount of cheese was that—that we were consuming is not healthy! [chuckles]

**Sydnee:** Well—

**Justin:** This is the—take a second, right? This is the USDA.

**Sydnee:** Yeah.

**Justin:** Which is the branch of the government that oversees the DMI. So, the USDA in 2010 is simultaneously manufacturing and marketing a Domino's pizza with 40% more cheese, while it is telling people to cut their cheese consumption in half! Thereby creating, by my math, a 200% deficit in their cheese guidance, I feel! There's a 200% gap in their approach to cheese!

**Sydnee:** I mean, that just feels like it was a little bit of a sneak peek into what life in 2026 was going to constantly be like.

**Justin:** Yeah, yeah.

**Sydnee:** "No, we promise we want you to get vaccinated! Are we changing all of the vaccine schedules and underfunding vaccine research and in every other way we can, you know, hurting public confidence in vaccines? Yes. But we do want you to get vaccinated!"

**Justin:** Mm-hm. So, that's the fast-food angle of it. There's also, the DMI has a program—this is my favorite. Fuel up to play 60! [chuckles]

**Sydnee:** Fuel up—

**Justin:** That's a partner—

**Sydnee:** With milk?

**Justin:** That's a partnership between the NFL and the DMI. Fuel up to play 60 encourages students to consume nutrient-rich foods... milk and cheese. [chuckles]

**Sydnee:** Does that mean 60 minutes?

**Justin:** Milk and cheese! [chuckles] What?

**Sydnee:** Does that mean 60 minutes?

**Justin:** Get at least 60 minutes of physical activity every day, and eat as much cheese and ice cream as you can to power your activity!

**Sydnee:** I wonder if that's a successful campaign, because like looking at that logo and then hearing fuel up to play 60, that does not sound... I feel like it would—

**Justin:** I should mention, there was—

**Sydnee:** Fail.

**Justin:** There was brief congressional scrutiny about the fact that the USDA was telling people to get less cheese and more cheese, but then they kind of lost interest.

**Sydnee:** [titters]

**Justin:** The—

**Sydnee:** America.

**Justin:** The NDC, just part of the DMI—this is something that should probably get more attention, I think. From what I was reading, this is probably more serious, but NDC also has nutrition scientists and dietitians and other folks, lobbyists, whose whole job is to talk to the American Academy of Pediatrics, all the different doctor associations, to try to... The

way they put it is, "Research-based information about dairy's health benefits." So—[titters] yeah.

**Sydnee:** [sighs] Hah... I mean, I don't—what's weird to me is like, what you're talking about is very similar to a lot of the ways that big pharma operates. And the same entities that are currently screaming about how big pharma has misled us, and we don't need medicine, and food is medicine, and nutrition and blah, blah, blah, are the same entities that are screaming about how we need to drink more milk.

**Justin:** Right. Now, what's hard about that is that we have, and you touched on this last time, but... what goes un-sort-of-said so far with a lot of this stuff is—or as you pointed out earlier, there are cultures that are better at breaking that down.

**Sydnee:** Yes. Yeah. It's do you have the enzyme lactase as an adult or not? Because if you don't, dairy is probably going to make you feel lousy, and you probably aren't going to want to drink much of it.

**Justin:** So, foisting dairy on people is, in a sense, racist, because what you're saying is there are certain people that are going to do better with this, and certain people that won't. So, if you're funding it in schools, for example, you're creating an imbalance, right there, for kids.

**Sydnee:** Yes.

**Justin:** I mean, just to give you an example. But there's also this idea that gets tied to that where if you—and it—you know, when you're talking about alt-right garbage, it's always this question of like, if you take it seriously enough to engage with, then, oh, you missed the joke. PS, guys, it wasn't fun—if it's not funny, there's no joke. Like it—the—but if you—if you take it seriously, then it's—

"Oh, you didn't get it. You didn't understand it. It was never serious. You know we weren't really drinking milk as a racist protest, it was like a joke we were doing, and you didn't get it. So ha-ha, you idiot." But that is the—the basis of it goes back to that—the work that Elmer did, and the basic truth that there are certain cultures that are better with milk.

So this idea that like, if you can't drink milk, then you shouldn't be in America, is an idea that is—it becomes part of the national identity because the US government has been pushing it because of this arrangement for that long. And it may have started without those—like, without any sort of negative thoughts behind it. But like, when you institutionalize a substance in your government DNA for that long, there are going to be repercussions. You know?

**Sydnee:** Yes. Well, and I—it may—what it makes me think is like, obviously the main driver here is we're keeping the dairy industry profitable.

**Justin:** Mm-hm.

**Sydnee:** And it's—the machine's feeding itself. And that, from an economic standpoint, I see why the government would be interested in doing that. But the reason it finds such fertile ground for its messaging is its ties to white supremacy. Not consciously, I'm not saying everybody who's ever told their kid to drink milk is thinking, "I'm racist. I want my kid to drink milk." But that is—that's the underpinnings that they are—that they are using, I mean, that make it successful. That's why the campaigns are successful.

**Justin:** Yeah. I read actually, this is interesting, from a piece that was in the New York Times in 2018, that said that lactase persistence actually arose independently in East African herding communities. So, it's not just a—while it is a... culturally more, you know, white people have this enzyme, there's nothing about whiteness specifically that would, you know, include—

**Sydnee:** No, it's just where the mutation first arose, and then that population continued to spread it. And there's a lot of them in America. That's it.

**Justin:** It's worth noting, by the way, that with all this like attachment of milk to racism in this time period during the first Trump administration, this time, DMI has not spoken out about this. So like this is not—the DMI has not said like, "Racists are not welcome at milk."

**Sydnee:** Well, who—okay, but here is—here is where the whole story gets weird for me.

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** Som I feel like, in terms of is milk healthy for you—and I—did I say this last episode? I think maybe I did. Like, the scientific conclusion on that is, well, it's healthier than some things and it's unhealthier than others. Like I think what I said was, it's better for you than bacon, probably.

**Justin:** Yeah, probably.

**Sydnee:** But it's not as good for you as nuts.

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** Does it have stuff your body needs? Yes. Can you get those things elsewhere? Yes. So, is milk necessary? No. But does that mean it is inherently bad for you? No. But I mean, the idea that we need to promote milk as like only milk can fill a certain void, is a false idea. And I do think that idea has been perpetuated.

I mean, I—as a physician, I—so many parents have asked me like, "When do I start giving my kid milk and how much milk and when can I stop giving them milk?" That's a question a lot. "When can I stop making my kid drink milk?" So, obviously, we have perpetuated the idea that you have to.

**Justin:** Right.

**Sydnee:** So, and we don't know how much milk is too much, or whatever. So, that's always been there. For a while, we were moving away from milk, because there was this whole idea that dairy was inflammatory and all these wellness people were like, "It's unnatural to drink milk from a cow. You're not a baby cow, what's—" So, I heard all that in the wellness circles, right?

**Justin:** Sure.

**Sydnee:** And then somehow we've gotten to a place in the wellness circles

where they're like, "No, no, no, not only is dairy good, full-fat dairy is good. Straight from the freaking cow. Don't pasteurize it. Drink that raw, full-fat milk, like just like right out of the udder."

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** And that's in—I mean, you're hearing that echoed not just in like the manosphere, but in like wellness circles are starting to latch onto this. I mean I see these like carnivore diet dairy people who are the same people who were telling us to, you know, stay away from all dairy and all gluten a year ago. And now it's all different.

**Justin:** Yeah. It's a—honey, our culture is a diaspora. There's a lot of different ideas being bounced around. You never know who's going to be advocating for what.

**Sydnee:** Did the DMI pay for the Kid Rock commercials?

**Justin:** I don't know the DMI—

**Sydnee:** Where did—where did the money come from? I want to know who paid for Kid Rock and RFK Jr. sitting in a hot tub together, drinking milk. I want to know.

**Justin:** So, the MAHA stuff gets complicated mainly because it's happening a lot more currently. But the basic structure is thus; we get to this time period where we're still trying to sell milk. We don't want to back off of selling milk, because we have a lot of dairy farmers that want us to sell more milk.

**Sydnee:** Right.

**Justin:** But what's hard is, a lot of the dairy farmers, the small independent dairy farmers, feel that the checkoff disproportionately benefits the large corporations. So, the checkoff isn't really benefiting everybody equally. But you're—the big corporations are the ones who have lobbyists, and so the system stays the way it is, even though it's clearly dysfunctional.

**Sydnee:** Right.

**Justin:** They're still... to finish up the DMI educational aspects of it, they are to this day like still like out there hustling. The flagship program, well, one of them, is called Discover Dairy. And Discover Dairy is an upper elementary and middle school curriculum that is aligned with common core standards, and has more than 52,000 classrooms enrolled. Sydnee, do you know what the name of their flagship program is?

**Sydnee:** What?

**Justin:** Adopt-A-Cow. Go on, Syd.

**Sydnee:** Well... Well... [titters]

**Justin:** Yup!

**Sydnee:** [sighs] Hah...

**Justin:** I mean it's not, you can admit, it's not like this is the worst...

**Sydnee:** I know, it's—

**Justin:** Dairy farming—

**Sydnee:** Well, it's insidious though.

**Justin:** Does not necessarily need to be—we talk about a lot of bad stuff on this show, I don't know that we need to demonize dairy farming—

**Sydnee:** No! Well, I don't want to do—

**Justin:** Dairy lobbies.

**Sydnee:** I don't want to—I don't want to demonize any farmers and dairy farmers or anyone else. I don't. I mean, because the thing is—

**Justin:** You're just sad that your child got indoctrinated by US government dairy propaganda?

**Sydnee:** Yes!

**Justin:** [laughs] Me too!

**Sydnee:** Yes! We brought the cow home!

**Justin:** We brought the cow home—

**Sydnee:** We took the—

**Justin:** And didn't even get the milk for free!

**Sydnee:** We took the cow to... where did we take it? We took the cow somewhere. COSI or something? We took—

**Justin:** COSI or something!

**Sydnee:** We took the cow on a trip with us so that we could take pictures of our kid with the cow and then bring 'em back to class and be like, "Look, here's the cow going on adventures." So, yeah, we have done this. We've participated in this propaganda. And I don't—I'm not even using propaganda in a negative way. It just is, right? It is propaganda.

**Justin:** Yes.

**Sydnee:** I think the problem is, you remember on the last episode when you bo—when we both made the comment, isn't nut milk bad for the environment in some way?

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** We got an email from a listener saying like, "Eh, it's not quite—that's kind of a misunderstanding."

**Justin:** Oh, a—from me, that is not a surprise.

**Sydnee:** Well, me too. I thought it was too. And it's much more nuanced. There are some areas in which like it uses more water, but then in terms of carbon footprint, it's not necessarily—so like, it's a lot more nuanced. But why do you—why did you and I both latch on to the messaging that nut milk was bad for the environment? Why did that stick in our brains?

**Justin:** I don't know.

**Sydnee:** Because it was probably a really useful tool to make sure we kept drinking dairy milk, wasn't it?

**Justin:** Mm-hm... Ah, yes, yes!

**Sydnee:** So, you got to wonder about those things!

**Justin:** Did you see butter boards getting their moment in the sun on TikTok with a bunch of influencers?

**Sydnee:** Yes, the butter boards!

**Justin:** The butter boards. You know, the...

**Sydnee:** Oh, god, cheese boards, charcuterie, oh my god?

**Justin:** Do you know who's responsible for butter boards? Okay, check this out. It was a... it was this big spread, Justine Doiron was the name of the influencer that kind of kicked off the whole thing. And DMI has claimed credit for the butter board in industry press.

Because while the original butter board video did not include advertising disclosure and was not part of her partnership, technically the chef posted a dairy management ad two days before her viral post, and it was part of the industry group's dairy dream team of paid influencers. So, DMI has a paid dream team of influencers, that includes, Sydnee...

**Sydnee:** Is that Mr. Beast?

**Justin:** That's Mr. Beast! If you've seen Mr. Beast visit a dairy farm, that was paid for by DMI.

**Sydnee:** Mr. Beast...

**Justin:** Partnership with DMI.

**Sydnee:** How could you? [chuckles]

**Justin:** Here is—

**Sydnee:** My standards for you were so high—

**Justin:** This is gr—

**Sydnee:** My bar for Mr. Beast was so high.

**Justin:** This is great, and I want—I really want to—I want to read this directly from Grist, because I think it's great. It is perhaps dairy promoters' biggest coup of last year. The limited-run McDonald's Grimace Shake went viral after TikTok users began crafting miniature horror films featuring the bright purple beverage. Dairy management has a longstanding partnership with McDonald's.

Beginning in 2009, it placed two dairy scientists at the fast-food chain to help incorporate more dairy into the menu. Less than a decade later, four in five McDonald's menu items contain dairy, according to a dairy management board member. Dairy management has even funded research to help improve McDonald's notoriously glitchy milkshake machines.

**Sydnee:** So, the—I fell into that trap, too. I made a Grimace Shake video.

**Justin:** Mm-hm... It's *all* US propaganda. [chuckles]

**Sydnee:** All propaganda.

**Justin:** It's all propaganda!

**Sydnee:** But see, that's—I mean—

**Justin:** [laughs]

**Sydnee:** There's more hypocrisy in the—with the current HHS than we could even begin to cover on this show. And we talk about it a lot. But the idea that somebody like RFK Jr. as head of the MAHA movement, who walks around talking about the influence of big pharma and big medicine in the government, and how we've tricked people and lied to people and paid people to make them, you know, get a vaccine that will save their life—evil trick...

**Justin:** Mm-hm.

**Sydnee:** But at the same time, he will tout dairy and have that—and like the level of influence that the dairy industry has in government, and then in all of these other ways through government—

**Justin:** Mm-hm.

**Sydnee:** To keep making us eat and drink more dairy. And he has no... accountability for that.

**Justin:** Yeah, for instance, they hired Aubrey Plaza to sell wood milk in an ad that lampooned milk alternatives. And—

**Sydnee:** I understood that.

**Justin:** Yeah, wood milk. And then this one, they did a campaign with Brian Baumgartner, who is Kevin on The Office. And the tagline of that one was, and I really— "Never doubt what you love." Surprisingly grim, I know.

**Sydnee:** [titters] Ah...

**Justin:** So—[chuckles] So, that's the fluid milk folks there, they're still—

**Sydnee:** Is that Trump 2028?

**Justin:** I know, right?

**Sydnee:** [chuckles]

**Justin:** So, they're still trying to get the—get the word out there. The thing with the MAHA stuff, there was definitely a push for raw milk that was being led by a bunch of MAHA type people. And then that kind of fell off, there was not the—I don't think the appetite was there, if you'll pardon the pun, for raw milk. But there is this—

**Sydnee:** It is in West Virginia, though?

**Justin:** So, there is this—well, yeah. There's this recirculation of these ideas that white milk, whiteness, smarter people than me can draw these like connections. But you can obviously see, like there's a lot of reporting on this currently, like if you see... god, as recently as February 2026, there's a piece, the milk mustache is back, about the return of white power milk from the International Association of Vegan Sociologists, who, of course, have a horse in this race. But The Washington Post ran a story of it at the end of January, so, it's a thing, it's—they're doing it.

**Sydnee:** Dairy consumption is slightly back up again.

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** Nut milk consumption is slightly down, or milk alternatives, not just nut milks, but all milk alternatives are slightly down. So, they're succeeding in their campaign, and there's a lot of fertile ground for that sort of white supremacy messaging right now, unfortunately.

**Justin:** A lot of folks also... here, you probably know how to pronounce these people's names better than I do in this paragraph here.

**Sydnee:** Are you talking about Ballerina Farm right now?

**Justin:** Yes, right here.

**Sydnee:** Oh, you're talking—man, okay... You're talking about, Nara Smith drank raw milk while visibly pregnant. And then Hannah Neeleman, who is Ballerina Farm, paused direct-to-consumer raw milk sales in 2025 after state inspectors found elevated coliform bacteria.

**Justin:** Mm-hm.

**Sydnee:** Colony-forming bacteria. So, that doesn't surprise me. You know though, you would think that with raw milk, people would drink it and they would get sick. And then you would go, "Oh, well, maybe that was a bad idea." And so it's an idea that would kind of burn itself out, right? But that hasn't always proven true.

**Justin:** Mm-hm.

**Sydnee:** Like, we are very—we humans will do a bad idea and hurt ourselves, and then keep doing the bad idea sometimes. So, I don't know. I'm familiar with both of those creators, sadly. [chuckles] The tradwife aesthetic is all part of this, too. Milk and like having a—having your own farm and like growing your own food. Which, I'm not slamming these ideas independently, but it's become ingrained in white supremacy and white culture.

And also, it's very sexist. It's a very male-dominant culture that puts you as a woman at home on your farm, drinking your raw milk and having all of your children, and not really having a life outside of that as the like highest form of womanhood. Which, if that's your thing, fine. No problem with that. Don't drink raw milk, still. But like, if that's what you want to do, do it. But it definitely is being held up as the white woman standard right now.

**Justin:** About a year ago, the FDA, after cuts from the Trump administration, they halted their lab proficiency testing program for grade A milk. So they're not—they stopped testing the labs that test to make sure milk is grade A. But there's been no stoppage of trying to push it on people. So, that's the deal! It is—milk is—like has all this baggage attached to it, and that's why.

**Sydnee:** And it's—

**Justin:** That's the story.

**Sydnee:** Can I say, from a medical perspective, as I've said, the science on milk is that it can be part of a healthy diet and it cannot, depending on how you consume it. There is no question as to whether or not you should drink pasteurized milk, you should. You should not drink raw milk. It's dangerous. It can make you sick. You might drink it and not get sick, but that doesn't mean that you won't get sick next time.

So, you shouldn't drink raw milk. If you want to drink some milk and it doesn't make you sick, I'm not going to tell you not to. But if you can't drink milk because you're lactose intolerant, I'm not going to tell you to drink milk. It's sad because there are probably scenarios where, depending on where you live and your economic status and what foods are available, milk may be a really useful source of certain nutrients.

You know, it may be a really great way to make sure you're getting calcium into your diet, that you're getting vitamin D, if it's fortified with vitamin D. That you're getting things you need, right? Depending on where you live and what you have available to you. So, we shouldn't demonize milk, like you said, just like we shouldn't demonize dairy farmers. It may be really good for where you live and what you eat.

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** And then also, you may have plenty of other sources and you do not need milk. And so forcing it on especially school children who maybe have no other option if they are getting their lunch for free at school, and their parents are not in a position to send an alternative to school for them to eat and drink... I think that that is racist.

**Justin:** There's also... I think there is an aspect of the whole more recent thing, you know, this idea that like whole—it is tied up with whole milk, and 2% milk, basically.

**Sydnee:** Yes.

**Justin:** You know, "It was good enough for me when I was a kid." Well, the reason it was good enough for you when you were a kid is because you were in these same programs that they were—the government was foisting milk upon you! Yes, that's true, yes! [chuckles]

**Sydnee:** I mean, I think if we are—if we—if—as white Americans, if we can come to a point where we're reckoning with the idea of the good old days as not being the good old days for most people, right? Just for a select few who are making the... sort of the rules about what the good old days were. Milk is part of that story.

**Justin:** Also, when the food pyramid got flipped, whole milk, whole dairy, they were, you know, one of the pillars. And three of the nine experts who helped design that had ties to the National Dairy Council. So...

**Sydnee:** I've got to question my charcuterie now, Justin. I'm sitting here thinking about the rise of charcuterie and how much I love a good—I mean, I like the meats on there, too, but I love the cheeses, and...

**Justin:** Mm-hm.

**Sydnee:** I don't know what to do with that now.

**Justin:** You can have a vegan charcuterie?

**Sydnee:** Yes.

**Justin:** Just all kinds of pickles! A bunch of little pickles.

**Sydnee:** I like cheese, though.

**Justin:** Thanks so much for listening to our podcast. We want to ask one more time, if you like what we do here, if it's important to you, if you want more of it, go to [maximumfun.org/join](https://maximumfun.org/join). We really, really appreciate your support. It means the world to us.

**Sydnee:** It really does. I love doing this show.

**Justin:** Me too.

**Sydnee:** And it really means so much to me that you enjoy it enough to help support us and do it more.

**Justin:** So, thank you so much. Thanks to The Taxpayers for the use of their song "Medicines" as the intro and outro of our program. That URL, one last time, [maximumfun.org/join](http://maximumfun.org/join). Please, it's the last time we're going to ask you. If you like Sawbones, don't wait, just go do it right now, because you're going to forget about it and there's gonna be—you know. Just go to the URL right now. Five bucks a month, you're going to get a bunch of great bonus content and help support media that you can rely on. You know?

**Sydnee:** Yeah.

**Justin:** Thank you so much for listening.

**Sydnee:** Thank you.

**Justin:** That's going to do it for us. Until next time, my name is Justin McElroy.

**Sydnee:** I'm Sydnee McElroy.

**Justin:** And as always, don't drill a hole in your head.

["Medicines" by The Taxpayers plays]

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