

# 24x7 operations, sanitised trucks, GPS: Locked down with Mother Dairy

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IT IS 8.50 am and a fleet of 110 tanker-trucks leaves a 50-acre plant in East Delhi's Patparganj. Over the next seven hours, the vehicles will criss-cross the length and breadth of Delhi-NCR, replenishing about 2,500 outlets, ensuring that through the lockdown, if there is one item the Capital hasn't run out of, it's milk.

Founded in 1974, as part of Operation Flood to make India self-sufficient in milk, Mother Dairy, owned by the National Dairy Development Board, is now a part of the capital's landscape - diversifying into milk products, vegetables, oil and sweets.

The company roughly controls over 45% of the market in Delhi-NCR, much ahead of competitors like Amul and the Delhi Milk Scheme. Its turnover in 2019-20 was around Rs 10,500 crore (the dairy part Rs 8,200 crore).

## 8.30 AM

The trucks are about to leave Mother Dairy's main Patparganj branch. With about 150 employees working in eight-hour shifts round the clock, the plant processes about 41 lakh litres of milk daily, including that sold through polypacks.

The milk is procured from 10 lakh farmers across 25,000 villages in 10 states, including Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Punjab, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Bihar. The company has 27 processing plants, like Patparganj's, where the milk procured is put through nearly 25 mandatory tests.

Says Navneet Sharma, Senior Manager (Quality Assurance): "If the specimen fails even one test, the entire tanker is sent back. In quality, *galti se bhi galti nahin ho sakti* (there can be no errors)."

Chetan Sharma, General Manager (Milk Procurement), says they get milk from as far as Chittoor and Anantapur districts in Andhra Pradesh (over 2,000 km away).

"The milk processed at the Chittoor plant is transported to

Delhi by an exclusive six-bogie tanker-train run by the Railways every alternate day. So, milk procured from a farm in Andhra Pradesh is sold in Delhi within 48 hours."

A majority of the employees are either housed in staff quarters next to the Patparganj plant or live nearby, ensuring there haven't been any problems getting to work during the lockdown. In a 24x7 operation, insulated tanker-trucks that maintain a temperature of 4-7 degrees Celsius, and with a capacity of 9,000 litres each, are filled with milk.

Amarjeet, 42, who has been employed with Mother Dairy for 16 years, is a driver on one of the trucks. "Milk is an essential, so police don't bother us much," he says.

## 9.30 am

Booth 727 in Mandawali, about 4 km from the plant, is Amarjeet's first halt of the day. He will make seven by afternoon.

The shop is "supervised" by Ramesh Chand, 50, who retired as an air force sergeant and was posted at the Mother Dairy booth four years ago. Mother Dairy only allots booths to ex-services personnel as part of a policy.

At the booth, Amarjeet pulls out a hose pipe from the rear of the truck, and sanitises it with chlorine water, before filling around 800 litres in the booth's storage tank. "This is not an extra precaution. Milk is perishable, so cleanliness has to be maintained at all times," he says.

Chand points to the yellow circles drawn on the pavement outside the booth, leading up to plastic crates before the counter. "I tell customers to stand within the circles, and not get too close to the crates when at the counter."

## 10 AM

K P S Chauhan, General Manager (Logistics), and Vinod Kumar Chopra, Strategic Business Unit head (Milk Sales), have come today to keep an eye.

Says Chopra, "To ensure that all stores remain functional, we have replacement staff. About 16

employees at our booths have had to be quarantined because cases were reported in their areas. Yet, we kept their booths functional."

Chauhan says they have been up to the challenge as "everything is organised". "The outlets are mapped and routes pre-decided as per demand." The movement of every truck is tracked via GPS from the Patparganj plant.

## 2.30 PM

Amarjeet arrives back at the Patparganj plant with 100 litres still in the truck. It is mandatory to bring back that quantity, which is then tested and alarm raised if any parameter has changed from the original.

By 3 pm, almost all the trucks from the morning round are back. The longest route covered is Patparganj to Gurgaon, about 80-85 km in all.

Every vehicle then gets a thorough wash, the interiors with caustic acid and hot water, and the body with hypochlorite solution.

A Mother Dairy official says all their processing units are working at full steam. Says Chief Operating Officer S Ram Mohan Rao: "The demand has not fallen. In fact, on the first two days of the lockdown, we sold more than 5 lakh litres above our daily sales... largely due to hoarding. Our other products like paneer, ice creams, dairy whitener and sweets are also selling like hot-cakes."

Chetan Sharma, General Manager (Milk Procurement), points out what this means for not just Delhi but other parts of the country. "If we don't reach out to remote areas in faraway states, which is our mandate, who will? We not only provide farmers a market all round the year but also complete payment every 10 days."

## 6 PM

It's time for the evening round. Around 85 tanker-trucks hit the roads again, driven by another set of drivers. This round will wind up around 2 am, ensuring that the capital has its milk when it gets up the next morning.