

Possession of Dairy Milk Crates To Become Illegal in 1990

DURHAM, NC—Unauthorized possession of the colorful, plastic milk crates, used by dairies to transport milk, will be against the law in North Carolina, effective Jan. 1, 1990. The versatile cases often are used by college students for book-cases and other pieces of furniture.

Carolina/Virginia Dairy Products Association, representing processors in the two states, today announced a public awareness campaign designed to inform North Carolina college students of the new, tougher law.

Posters encouraging students to return cases to local dairies or grocery stores will be distributed soon to college and university residence halls across the state.

Effective Jan. 1, 1990, North Carolina statute (GS14-72.4) makes the unauthorized possession of milk cases a misdemeanor punishable by a \$300 fine and/or imprisonment.

Nearly a million milk cases were borrowed, stolen or misappropriated in North Carolina and Virginia dairies during the past year at a cost of \$2 million to the industry, and eventually the consumer.

Often used as furniture, file boxes

or storage bins, the crates are lost to a public attitude that they are free for the taking.

"Nothing could be further from the truth," according to Carolina/Virginia Dairy Products Assn. President Phillip Holder of Pet Inc. in Charlotte. "These cases are a major expense to dairies, and the magnitude of the loss is hurting every dairy in the country."

According to a national survey, there are \$250 million worth of crates missing across the country. There have been no national, uniform solutions to the problem.

Prior to this new legislation, milk case theft in the state was a misdemeanor under general theft statutes. With passage of the tougher legislation, North Carolina joins the ranks of a number of other states, combining concentrated enforcement efforts and publicity campaigns to try to recover crates and control losses.

The law applies only to milk crates bearing the name of the owner, not plastic crates purchased in department stores or elsewhere; however, defacing or removing the identification mark is also illegal.

Cases should be returned to a local dairy or neighborhood grocery store, said Holder. No questions will be asked through Dec. 31, 1989.

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