

Dairy FOODS

For butter or for worse

I can't believe she's not butter! Princess Kay of the Milky Way to be sculpted in oleo

High butter prices spoil a Minnesota State Fair tradition of carving the likenesses of young women in blocks of butter.



I can't believe she's not butter! Princess Kay and her court will be carved in oleo, not butter, at the 2016 Minnesota State Fair.

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Princess Kay of the Milky Way has been done in by her own success. Record-high prices for butter and a tight state budget have forced state fair organizers to find alternative sculpting media. So this year, for the first time ever at the Minnesota State Fair, Princess Kay of the Milky Way and her court will have their likenesses carved in blocks of oleo, a nondairy product made from vegetable oil.

No more 'butter cow' at Iowa State Fair either

The high butter prices also are affecting a long-held tradition at the state fair in neighboring Iowa. Officials there said their renowned "butter cow" also will be carved in oleo. But the Iowa ag industry is generally supportive of the move, since margarine (as oleo is sometimes called) is often made of corn oil. Corn is a cash crop in the Hawkeye State, but dairy farmers and dairy processors in the Land of 10,000 Lakes are fuming.

Princess Kay and the other princesses act as goodwill ambassadors for the dairy industry. It's been a tradition for 60 years at the Minnesota State Fair for likenesses of these women to be sculpted into 90-pound blocks of butter. The women sit one at a time in a refrigerated case while a professional artist turns the butter block into a realistic head-and-shoulders sculpture. Fairgoers, typically licking ice cream cones or slurping milk shakes, gather around the case and watch.

The move from butter to oleo stunned the dairy industry because the state's economy is strong. Minnesota actually is running a \$1.2 million budget surplus for fiscal year 2016/2017, but the notoriously cautious legislature prefers to trim what it calls "non-essential outlays."

"I don't see how anyone in this state can call butter 'non-essential,'" said Gunnar Abrahamson, a spokesman for the state fair. "But these are the times we live in. It pains me to have to resort to a nondairy product."

The fair runs Aug. 25 to Sept. 5 at the state fairgrounds in St. Paul.

