

milk supply for one day's production of ice cream at Blue Bell Creameries.

The raw milk undergoes up to six different tests for quality before it is mixed in three 1,000-gallon vats with cream, condensed milk and cane sugar or syrup to produce a base.

After the mixture is pasteurized and homogenized, it's cooled and sent to holding tanks which pump the mixture into the flavoring tanks.

Each of the 40 flavors made by Blue Bell has a separate tank flavored with natural fruits, juices and sauces made by Blue Bell. The company even has its own cookies for its cookies and cream ice cream, Kenjura said, adding that since Nabisco doesn't package Oreos in bulk, it was too time consuming for Blue Bell employees to individually open each pack of cookies.

While the ice cream is still in a semi-soft stage, nuts and other dry ingredients are added. Then the ice cream is put into the cartons and turned upside down to eliminate air bubbles. (If you think it's hard to scoop single flavors out of the neopolitan cartons, you should see how they go in — all three flavors travel through the same pipe at the same time.)

The ice cream then undergoes a quick-freeze process for six and a half hours in a room with a wind-chill factor of 100 degrees below zero — definitely a quick way to cool off in summer.

Pallets of ice cream are stored in another room where they await the morning arrival of 35 transport trucks to take them to the distribution centers in Texas which include Houston, San Antonio, and Long View.

Ice cream production at Blue Bell takes place from

5 a.m. until 4 p.m. Then for nearly two and a half hours, pipes, tanks and other equipment are dismantled and each piece is individually hand-washed and put aside to dry.

In only 11 hours, Blue Bell Creameries Inc. produces 110 thousand gallons of ice cream, about 99 thousand ice cream sandwiches and well over 132 thousand popsicles and delivers two thousand to four thousand pallets of products to warehouses around Texas.

"No one handles our product but us," Kenjura said. "We're very proud of very fresh ice cream."

Reinforcing Blue Bell's magazine ad that simply says, "We eat all we can. We sell the rest," the employees are allowed to eat all the free ice cream that they want during the day; and with 500 employees in Brenham and 500 more throughout the state, that's a lot of ice cream!

Blue Bell makes about 40 flavors of ice cream, four flavors of frozen yogurt, four flavors of frozen custard, five flavors of ice cream sandwiches, drumsticks, fruit and cream bars and several kinds of stick snacks.

The newest ice cream flavors are banana-berry and chocolate crisp — chocolate ice cream with chocolate covered crispies.

However, Kenjura said the basics are still the top sellers. Homemade vanilla is the number one seller while cookies and cream is number two.

Some customers think that different lid colors on the ice cream cartons denote differences in quality. But, Kenjura said, the different colored rims relate not to the quality of the ice cream, but rather to the cost of the added ingredients. In fact, all

Blue Bell ice cream in round cartons contains 12 and a half percent milkfat.

Mellorine, made with vegetable fat instead of animal fat, and the 97 percent fat-free Blue Bell Light flavors are packaged in the square cartons.

Because Blue Bell can't produce all of its flavors all of the time, some (like fudge brownie nut and the cheesecake flavors) are rotational.

Kenjura explained that it's fun to not have everything available all of the time, and that production of flavors is dependent upon grocers' space and Blue Bell's cold

storage space.

"Before we can produce more ice cream, we have to have more cold storage," Kenjura said. "We have no place to put it. It wouldn't matter if you wanted it; we can't get it there, yet, until we grow. The key people, who are Brenham natives, choose to stay right here."

Blue Bell began giving tours in 1983, and 45,000 people visited the creamery last year.

Kenjura said Blue Bell has given tours to senior adults, church groups, school groups, caravans of people, and of course,

A&M groups; everyone is welcomed. For groups of more than 10, however, reservations must be made.

The tour lasts 30 to 40 minutes, depending upon how long it takes to eat your complimentary ice cream cone at the end of the tour.

"Homemade vanilla is our number one seller," Kenjura said, "but that's not what people eat here (at the creamery). Everybody likes something different."

Number one with *At Ease* was mint chocolate chip. I wonder what the cows like best.

At right: Why is this man smiling? Since Blue Bell allows its employees to eat all the ice cream they want while they're at work, Mike Marshall, a 1984 graduate of Texas A&M and floor supervisor at Blue Bell, has something to grin about.

Below: The finely tuned machinery at the Blue Bell creamery in Brenham produces 110,000 gallons of ice cream daily.

