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Steve Miller of the Dairy Council of California's Mobile Dairy Classroom talks about Mercedes, a brown Jersey cow, to students at E. Hale Curran Elementary School on Thursday.

STEVE THORNTON Staff Photographer

Milking the limelight: Kids have chance to pet 2-day-old calf

By: RANI GUPTA - Staff Writer

MURRIETA ---- Mercedes is only 5 years old, but already has the ability to make 150 third-graders giggle furiously and scream in their full, grossed-out horror.

Mercedes also weighs 1,000 pounds, recently gave birth ---- and is a Jersey cow.

She was on display Thursday for students at E. Hale Curran Elementary as part of a presentation put on by the California Dairy Council, a group funded by the dairy industry that promotes milk and dairy through events such as the so-called "mobile dairy classroom."

Steve Miller, a teacher who works full time giving the presentations, spent nearly an hour giving the students a primer on cows. He explained that most dairy farmers favor the familiar white-and-black Holstein cow because it produces more milk, but brown cows such as Mercedes have more cream in their milk.

"It helps keep the price of your ice cream down," said Miller, standing in front of the trailer where Mercedes stood munching on a pile of green alfalfa.

A few students doubled over in giggles as Miller demonstrated how to milk a cow by asking students to stick out their right thumbs and turn their fists upside down and squeezing it gently with the left hand. Cows are milked slowly and gently, Miller explained, unlike what kids see on TV.

There were high-pitched squeals as Miller squeezed one of the cow's teats, sending a stream of milk inches from the students sitting on the pavement in the front row.

The highlight for most of the kids was at the end of the show, when Miller brought out a 2-day-old calf from the back of the trailer and students lined up to run their hands down the black-and-white calf's back.

"OMG!" one girl yelled as Miller walked the calf down the ramp from his trailer into the school parking lot.

Giorgie Holborn, 8, was thrilled that the calf felt soft to the touch. "It felt like a stuffed animal," said Giorgie, who is in third grade.

But after Sara Lillie, 8, touched the animal, she squealed to her friends, "Ewww! That was gross!"

The third-grader explained, "It was, like, wet and stuff. I thought it would be dry."

Fellow third-grader Megan Falcon, 8, had already seen cows. Aside from the three-legged-calf she saw on the Animal Planet network, Megan said she helped milk a cow on a field trip and visited a dairy farm where the father of her best friend, Sydnee Reinhard, works.

The calf she petted Thursday, named Pepper Jack, was "really cute," she said.

"Me and Sydnee said if we ever eat pepper jack cheese, let's say it came from Pepper Jack," Megan said.

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