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SE World
HD Camel **milk** demand rising
BY Jonathan Pearlman, For The Straits Times, In Perth
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AT A small **dairy** farm outside the Australian city of Perth, Mr Gilad Berman walks his herd to the pen and starts his twice-daily milking round.

Carefully attaching a tube to the udder and watching as the **milk** begins to flow, Mr Berman says the process is identical to that at countless other dairies across Australia and the world.

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But there is one significant difference: Mr Berman is not milking a cow but a one-humped camel. His **business**, Australian Camel Dairies, is the country's first commercial producer of camel **milk** - a product that could soon help to satisfy the world's growing demand for **milk**.

Known as "white gold" and long believed by Arabian nomads to have medicinal properties, camel **milk** is in increasing demand across the world. The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation estimates there are 200 **million** potential customers worldwide in an industry that could be worth more than A\$10 **billion** (S\$11.4 **billion**) a year. Currently, only about 0.3 per cent of the world's **milk** comes from camels, with 83 per cent from cows, 12 per cent from buffaloes and the remainder from goats and sheep.

Experts say camel **milk** is healthier and easier to digest than cow's **milk**. Saltier than cow's **milk**, it has 10 times more iron, three times more vitamin C and less saturated fat. They believe its antibodies can help combat a range of diseases including cancer, Aids and hepatitis C.

Numerous countries have thriving domestic camel **dairy** industries, including Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Pakistan and Kenya.

Mr Berman said camel **milk** is ideal for the Asian market, where many people, particularly in **China**, are just starting to add **dairy** products as a staple of their diets.

Australia provides about 7 per cent of the world's **dairy** supplies, with **China**, Japan and Singapore the largest buyers.

Australian Camel Dairies has 20 camels and produces 450 litres a month, which is **sold** in Australia for A\$20 a litre, compared with a wholesale price of about A\$0.40 for cow's **milk**. It plans to expand to 300 camels in the next four years, while at least one other Australian camel **dairy** is due to open this year.

Australia is well positioned to be a major producer because it has an estimated 750,000 camels, the world's largest population of wild camels. The camels were imported from India and the Middle East in the 19th century to assist with transport in remote settlements. They have multiplied beyond control and are often regarded by farmers as pests.

Mr Berman, 43, moved with his wife and children to Australia from Israel in November 2011 to set up the **dairy** after seeing a news story about plans to cull thousands of the camels.

"We want to show that you can **milk** feral animals. We can have a new industry here."

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ART Mr Berman milking camels in his farm near Perth. He said camel **milk** is ideal for the Asian market, where many people, particularly in **China**, are just starting to add **dairy** products as a staple of their diets. -- ST PHOTO: JONATHAN PEARLMAN

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