

Demand for a ‘sustainable’ dairy industry on the rise

Written by Kevin Ponticelli

Recent market research by the U.S. dairy industry shows that a growing number of consumers care about the health and environmental impact of the products they buy.

As a result, there is a growing demand for products made responsibly. This presents an opportunity for dairy to continue to show how it is producing its products in a sustainable and environmentally friendly way.



The Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy, which provides a forum for the entire dairy industry to work together pre-competitively to address barriers and opportunities to foster innovation and increase sales, conducted an analysis of existing consumer attitudes toward sustainability and combined it with the center's own research. The conclusion is that consumers care more than ever about the environmental impact of the products they buy and that they may buy more of those products they feel are environmentally friendly.

Unfortunately, most consumers don't know enough about dairy's heritage of environmental stewardship. For example, according to a study completed in 2009 by Cornell University, the dairy industry has reduced the carbon footprint of its products by 63 percent over the last 60 years, thanks to production efficiencies, nutrient management and other improvements. Also, the University of Arkansas Applied Sustainability Center estimates that only 2 percent of greenhouse gas emissions in the U.S. are attributed to dairy.

Dairy producers remain committed to advancing farm management practices that make good economic, community and environmental sense. The U.S. Dairy Sustainability Commitment will help efforts to reduce costs and potentially create new sources of income as America's dairy producers – and the entire industry – work to further reduce their environmental impact.

To be clear, consumer decisions to purchase milk are still driven mainly by other, more traditional factors. Consumer research indicates that most people still buy milk because they like its good taste, find it “comforting” and believe it is a healthy choice that helps their kids grow strong and helps meet their daily recommendations for vitamins, minerals and protein.

The good news is that if consumers continue to believe these things and also come to understand that dairy is an environmentally friendly choice, their dairy consumption may increase. They welcome news that the dairy industry is continuing to find more ways to conserve resources, such as energy and water, and recycle manure into fertilizer and renewable energy. Additional studies by the center will attempt to quantify this opportunity for increased dairy consumption.

This growing body of consumer research reinforces the dairy industry's ongoing commitment to efficiency and responsibility both on the farm and throughout the value chain. Positive stories of the industry's sustainability efforts will help make dairy products more relevant and meaningful to today's consumers. **PD**

PHOTO:

Consumers welcome news that the dairy industry is continuing to find more ways to conserve energy and water, and recycle manure into fertilizer and renewable energy. *Photo by Van Garmon.*



Kevin Ponticelli
Executive Vice President of Sustainability
Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy

Click [here](#) to view the online version.