



The Dairy Research Institute (DRI), a non-profit organization, [unveiled its open innovation program](#) on November 6th.

The institute was founded in 2010 by the Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy and Dairy Management Inc. to identify research needs and attempt to solve problems across the industry. The recently announced open innovation program seeks to expand the scope of DRI's current research and development collaborations.

"We're very big into partnering," DRI's president Greg Miller told Crowdsourcing.org. "Our mantra is to leverage our resources with others as much as we can. We are doing work in a pre-competitive space that's of value to the whole industry."

The institute has worked with a variety of partners, from NASA and the Department of Defense to universities and non-profits working in similar fields at home and abroad. While DRI researchers had already been sending out requests to proposals to partner institutions, the organization decided to open its solicitation process to the crowd at large.

"We've seen companies like General Mills and Kraft, and many others," Miller said. "We went out and talked to some of those folks about how they [implemented open innovation], how it works, and what kind of experiences they've had with it."

The open innovation program is meant to expand DRI's reach outside the dairy industry. The institute has seen first hand that non-traditional partnerships can work in R&D. Looking for ways to better identify sodium levels in cheeses, for example, DRI researchers had reached out to a number of companies manufacturing analytical instruments. The most promising proposal came from a company operating primarily in the metallurgy field.

"That, to us, was a demonstration that open innovation can work in our industry," Miller said.

DRI's submission and evaluation process is fairly straightforward: the company has set up a [dedicated portal](#) that outlines the challenges DRI is looking to solve. Users submit a form with their proposed solutions, and a research team reviews the applications. (Miller said the most important thing to his researches is how well a proposed solution fits the needs of the challenge.) If the idea seems plausible, negotiations begin over the contract.

While there are no prizes offered for submissions, the institute believes the incentive for researchers to participate, aside from seeing their ideas implemented, is quite strong. The U.S. dairy industry is huge – America leads the world in [cow milk production](#) by quite a distance. So, "if it's a technology that solves an issue for the industry," Miller said, "the return could be quite substantial."

While the current challenges had gotten off to a slow start, Miller said the program has begun to gain some traction, with a number of individuals contributing solutions as well as inquiring further about the program.

Tags: [dairy](#), [dairy research institute](#), [Department of Defense](#), [gregory miller](#), [Milk](#), [Open innovation](#), [usda](#)



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