Insulate & Innovate to Drive Incremental Dairy

A Note From CEO, Geri Berdak

Today’s marketplace remains complicated. Over the past year, dairy, inflation surged to 16% while labor shortages and transportation challenges continue to interrupt supply chains. In the Southeast, five dairy bottling plants shut their doors in 2021, with the closure of three additional plants announced in 2022. This change in processing availability has led to challenges in our milk supply at retail and in schools.

Your Dairy Alliance staff is working diligently to ensure schools have milk service. Last month, The Dairy Alliance, The Alabama State Department of Education and Diversified Foods, Inc. hosted a webinar for school nutrition directors to provide solutions for school milk issues due to the Borden plant closures in Dothan, Alabama, and Hattiesburg, Mississippi. Read more about that work in this issue.

While managing the complications of today, we keep our eye on longer-term growth. We have built our 2023 plan and will present it to The Dairy Alliance board in October. The region and industry’s dynamics required us to rethink checkoff’s role in the Southeast. The Dairy Alliance shifted its focus to an organization that not only implements national programs at a local level, but strategically addresses opportunities and challenges to support dairy in the Southeast and in the US.

For 2023, we will continue to facilitate product and infrastructure innovations in the Southeast dairy category, seeking a potential differentiator for Southeast milk. We will continue working with farmers, coops, and other stakeholders to support both sustainability practices as well as marketing programs for consumers. Recognizing our population is our biggest asset, we will continue to invest in consumer research to better understand the wants and needs of our consumer base. We will scale our business development and digital/content marketing programs to effectively reach and convert our movable middle consumers to dairy users and ultimately drive dairy volume.

This year and next, we continue to work on your behalf with a focus on overcoming the challenges that the marketplace throws at us while advocating for dairy as an essential ingredient for life.

Aseptic Keeps Milk on the Lunch Menu

Each school year, The Dairy Alliance offers exciting dairy programs that make milk more accessible to students. We modernize milk for students through options like smoothies and iced coffee to show milk as a healthy and sustainable beverage.

One of the ways milk is adapting is in its packaging. Aseptic or shelf-stable milk is a valid milk option for many school districts. Aseptic packaging does not require refrigeration until opened, providing a longer shelf life and making it an appealing option during ongoing supply chain issues. The packaging is also made from renewable materials and can be recycled. These two characteristics mean shelf stable milk reduces spoilage and waste with fewer deliveries and a reduced cost for school nutrition teams.

Shelf-stable milk is real milk produced in the same way as conventional milk products. The only difference occurs during processing. To allow for a shelf life of over six months with no refrigeration before opening, the milk undergoes ultra-high temperature processing and is then filled in special aseptic cartons. This process does not interfere with the milk’s nutritional values, nor does it include additives or preservatives. Shelf stable milk is chilled before school meal service to keep milk an appealing option to students.

Providing aseptic milk to schools with supply chain issues means that milk stays on the menu. If not for aseptic milk, schools like those impacted from the Borden plant closures in Alabama and Mississippi could request that requirements for milk to be served with meals be waived. Though we strive to supply students with fresh, local milk, shelf-stable options ensure that children in public schools still have access to the 13 essential nutrients milk provides.

The Latest Menu Additions

Marble Slab Creamery offered a Cereal Swirl ice cream during National Ice Cream Month. Made from Marble Slab’s Sweet Cream, FROOT LOOPS® cereal, rainbow sprinkles, and marshmallow cream, this ice cream brought the classic breakfast pairing to dessert.

Also, the annual Free Gelato Day from Your Pie was held in July. The Dairy Alliance partnered with Your Pie to give customers a free scoop of gelato with each purchase.

The King Arthur Supreme Pizza from Round Table features pepperoni, Italian sausage, salami, linguica, mushrooms, green peppers, onions and black olives on zesty red sauce. The offering is available from September 26, 2022 to January 8, 2023.
Checkoff and the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, Explained

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGA) are designed to promote health practices according to the current body of research and nutrition science, and so are updated every five years by the US Department of Agriculture and the Department of Health and Human Services.

The public can provide input in the dietary guidelines process by nominating people to the committee and providing testimony.

While dairy checkoff cannot influence government policy, National Dairy Council can participate and share scientific facts with the committee during the public process.

In the 2025 update, saturated fat will be one area of focus, presenting an opportunity to amplify the science regarding the wellness benefits of dairy foods at all fat levels.

Why is this important? The DGA is foundational to federal nutrition security programs like school meals, Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) and to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). These programs support access to nutritious foods like dairy that reach 80 million people. This equates to approximately 12 billion pounds of dairy supplied by US dairy farmers. As the guidelines change, so do the foods offered. For example, federal guidelines mandate that national school meal programs align with the DGA, so schools must currently serve low or fat free milk.

Thanks to checkoff, investment and science, the evidence for dairy’s role in health is strong, and checkoff continues to prove dairy’s benefits with each update. When it comes to public health, dairy is in a good position.

Share Your Ideas to Your Dairy Checkoff

The monthly Your Dairy Checkoff podcast highlights how dairy promotion programs are working nationally and locally to build consumer trust, dairy sales and consumption to maximize dairy farmers checkoff investment.

The Your Dairy Checkoff Podcast features dairy farmers and industry leaders from across the country to ensure the podcast covers the topics that really matter to US dairy farmers. Recent episodes have included Southeast dairy farm guest hosts Jennifer Glover, Brittany Jones, Michael Ferguson and Joanna Shipp.

As a podcast for farmers, you help guide the topics covered. If you have a subject or question you would like answered in a future episode, or if you would like to be a host, reach out to your Agriculture Affairs Manager. You can listen to the podcast at dairycheckoffpodcast.com.

Borden Announces Closure of Two Southeastern Plants

Borden recently announced the closure of plants in Dothan, Alabama, and Hattiesburg, Mississippi, which provide milk to 494 districts in the Southeast region. On average, schools use around 95 million units a school year from these

In response, The Dairy Alliance staff has assisted school nutrition directors with milk supply bids so all impacted districts obtain a new supplier by the end of September. The Dairy Alliance is also communicating with school districts, state school nutrition leaders and area processors to find all available fluid milk options.

Strengthen Local Relationships & Support

DMI Highlights 2021

Dairy Management Inc. (DMI) works with industry partners to grow new opportunities for dairy sales, securing dairy’s place with younger consumers and positioning dairy as an essential, sustainable food source. In 2021, dairy checkoff addressed challenges of an ongoing global pandemic, supply chain disruptions and other factors affecting consumers. Here are the 2021 national checkoff results highlights:

- Foodservice partners grew an additional 250 million pounds in 2021, growing an average 2.2 billion pounds between 2009 and 2021.
- 99% growth in visitors to usdairy.org in 2021.
- Undeniably Dairy’s Reset Yourself with Dairy increased Gen Z’s awareness of the dairy category and positive dairy messages.
- The Dairy Alliance shared Reset Yourself with Dairy through 5 blogs and a video from LockLoadedMMA, George Lockhart.
- Influencers generated 200 million+ impressions to promote dairy benefits.
- Instacart ecommerce partnership led to $8 worth of dairy purchases for every $1 invested.
- The Dairy Alliance, Midwest Dairy and DMI targeted Black Americans in the Gen Z and Millennial Parent demographics, which are the consumers most likely to purchase plant-based products. The ads performed above industry standards at a 12% click-through rate and garnered over 12,400 clicks across the four ad categories: nutrition, immunity, lactose-free recipes and lactose-free milk.
- Secured $10 million each in partnerships with Nestlé and Starbucks, engaging research institutions in the Dairy Soil & Water Regeneration project with a $10 million grant from the Foundation for Food & Agriculture Research.
- Fluid milk partners introduced 13 new products, including flavored, lactose-free, shelf-stable and other value-added options supported with new packaging, promotion and other efforts.
- Shared consumer insights with Amazon to drive online traffic and sales. In the two years, Amazon’s natural cheese and milk sales growth outpaced overall category averages by over 20%
Adopt-A-Cow program is kicking off this fall for another year. The Adopt-A-Cow program is a partnership between Discover Dairy and The Dairy Alliance, providing dairy farmers the opportunity to connect to students across their state to build their understanding of the dairy industry and agriculture overall.

Last year, the program reached 252,000 students in The Dairy Alliance’s 8 states. This year, over 8,700 registered their classrooms for Adopt-A-Cow, which is 1,000 more than last year’s total. This goal was achieved through a social media campaign that reached over 133,000 people.

Local dairy farmers open their farms virtually to students, sharing farm updates and holding a live video chat with students who otherwise may not have the opportunity to see agricultural practices up close.

Farmers participating in Adopt-A-Cow during the 2022-2023 school year are:

- Shane Middleton of Middleton Dairy Farm in Moss Point, Alabama
- Katelin Benkoski of Big Sandy Creek Dairy in Madison, Georgia
- Hope Reynolds of R&T Farms | Magnolia, Kentucky
- Katie Mauthe of Mauthe Farms | McComb, Mississippi
- Matt Baldwin of Dusty Road Jersey Farm | Statesville, North Carolina
- Caci Nance of Nance Farm | McConnells, South Carolina
- Veronica Steer of Sunbow Jerseys | Cottage Grove, Tennessee
- Kim Martin of Catawba View Dairy | Fincastle, Virginia

Through their outreach, the Southeast’s dairy farmers are connecting young students to the dairy industry and building trust in the nutritious products it offers. If you are interested in participating in Adopt-A-Cow next year, please contact your Agriculture Affairs Manager.

The Dairy Alliance’s Laura Marbury wrote an article for Potential Magazine titled “Keep Calm and Reset Yourself with Dairy.” Targeted to Alabama teens working to be successful in school and life, the article shares tips for returning to school and how dairy’s nutrition can help students mentally and physically. This is part of larger efforts to position dairy as a key food for overall wellness.

The Dairy Alliance sponsored the National Medical Association’s Walk a Mile with a Child event during its annual conference in Atlanta, which promotes family fitness. The Dairy Alliance provided milk from Borden, cheese from Cabot and promotional materials to the over 3,000 attendants. National Dairy Council sponsored a session titled “Opportunities to Close Nutrition Equity Gap: The Role of Dairy Across the Life Span.”

The first virtual farm tour of the 2022-2023 school year was held at Crist Dairy in Edmonton this September. Farmer Billy led classrooms around the farm, highlighting sustainable practices to elementary and middle school students.

Supertalk’s Rebecca Turner did a live interview with The Dairy Alliance’s Donna Speed for her radio show, Good Things. They discussed preparing family meals with dairy for September’s Family Meals Month, giving listeners across the state insights into the importance of food choices and The Dairy Alliance’s work in the Southeast region.

The Dairy Alliance sponsored a webinar for NC WIC (Women’s Infant and Children) annual conference in Cookeville on August 31. Sponsored speaker Natasha Ashley, RD presented “Black Maternal Health Disparities,” highlighting the many health benefits dairy foods provide mother and baby, such as how milk helps expectant mothers meet iodine needs. The WIC nutritionists and staff in attendance can now share the importance of dairy throughout their practice and for pregnant mothers.

The Dairy Alliance hosted a farm tour at the Paulson Family Farm in Port Republic for 10 Turner Ashby High School student-athletes and their coach, along with two Virginia High School League (VHSL) employees. The students got to see firsthand where their milk comes from and how dairy farmers take care of their animals and the environment. The in-person tour opportunity was planned through The Dairy Alliance’s 2-year partnership with VHSL to build trust in dairy and the dairy industry among the Gen Z audience. The participants will join a virtual farm tour to Paulson farm this October to help communicate to other students the positive role of dairy farming.
In conjunction with MilkPEP's ongoing milk revitalization campaign, The Dairy Alliance focused back-to-school content on the important role milk plays in kid's nutrition. Along with blogs, milk facts and digital ads, dairy advocates shared the great-tasting ways kids can enjoy milk and the benefits it brings.

Nutrition advocates and social media influencers play an important part in sharing messages with consumers online. Acting as a trusted source to their followers, influencers present attractive lifestyle changes. Using advocates like foodie Heidi Billotto or registered dietitians Karman Meyer or Andy Mathis to promote the goodness of milk, reaches millennial parents and Gen Z students looking for healthy options.