

DAIRY HAS A HEALTHY RESPONSIBILITY TO GET IT RIGHT

Milk producers are an unusual bunch. That doesn't mean they are unusual as in odd or crazy (though some say to be in this business you have to be a little crazy), it is in the unusual responsibility they carry that separates them from rest. This is the responsibility of supplying one of nature's most nutritious foods to an ever expanding and ever hungry population.



In its infinite wisdom, nature came up with a product that delivers all of the nutrition and health a mammal needs in order to get a good, healthy start on life. This isn't such a simple process. Beyond providing the basic essentials of protein, fat, minerals, vitamins and so on, milk is constructed so as to be as efficient as possible in delivering not only the nutrients above but also keeping those nutrients from interacting with each other in a negative way. Furthermore, milk is able to get multiple performance features out of each of its components. For example, as milk is digested in the intestine the biological function of the proteins, lactose, fat change. Early on, they might fight off harmful bacteria, later on downstream they may assist the absorption of important vitamin or mineral nutrients. All told, this is amazing stuff and it's not just for kids. The secrets of milk deliver nutrition and health to people of all ages around the world. Producing the most nutritious food in the world places milk producers into a level of responsibility unlike any other food producer.

The markets for this food are changing. America's dairy industry received a surprise recently with the growth in overseas sales. This is an ongoing trend. As people in developing nations have the opportunity to improve their lives economically, they look to increase their health with a nutritional

product like milk. It's an easy choice because it is nutrient dense, easy to distribute and natural. Milk powders, whey powders, cheese, , etc. all contain little or reduced levels of water, which makes them easy to transport and often shelf stable for storage. Adding dairy products to a local diet increases the nutritional value of the diet beyond simple addition. Combining dairy with the native diet takes the best aspects of both to form a diet of better quality than you would predict. Succinctly put, the health of the world is directly related to the availability of milk products to global markets. Each time the affordability of milk moves to include the next lower income level, the health of that group goes up and thus the health of the global population naturally increases. Therefore, the lower the cost of milk production, the healthier the planet.

This does not mean producers need to give their products away. Every producer is entitled to profit from his work, support his family, pay employees a fair wage, contribute to the local community, and meet all obligations in accord with his position in life. Furthermore, it is in every producer's best interest to account for environmental stewardship, animal health, and animal welfare in order establish his business to be there for the next generation. In other words, maintain an attitude of sustainability. This sustainability, however, comes at a price – exactly what that will be is an open question. It is clear that the overriding objective must be to support sustainability at the least possible cost. The cost of producing the most nutritious food in the world has implications no less than the health of the world. This is no exaggeration. The markets are making this very clear. So

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it is that milk producers have the weight of unusual responsibility on their shoulders.

It is clear that the dairy industry must take on the mantle of sustainability for its own sake and for that of the consumer. The industry listens to consumer groups regarding environmental stewardship, animal

health and welfare. Ultimately, the regulatory process must exercise great wisdom and restraint to sort out regulations that will allow the producer to producer milk with proper attention to sustainability issues and with a corresponding attention to the poorest consumer in the U.S. or anywhere else our products are distributed. At the same time, the American dairy farmer must continue the well established business practice of producing that milk at the lowest possible cost. This is a dynamic process dependent on constantly emerging new scientific data and technologies. If regulations require the implementation of expensive technology that does not achieve the intended sustainability objective, that non-productive cost will be borne by the consumer in the form of higher prices. The consumer that suffers most is the poorest one.

We need to get this right. Our industry needs sustainable milk production carefully balanced with a focus on minimizing costs. Milk producers know their business, they understand what Providence has provided and take seriously the responsibility thrust upon them. Only by implementing scientifically sound technologies that focus on producing a product affordable to markets across all demographics and geographies can producers, regulators and the entire industry stand proud in their achievements toward creating a healthier world. □