



Insights from the Nourishing People and Planet Dinner and Pre-Conference Tours

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Sustainability Summit 2024 hosted by:



On March 25, 2024, a diverse group of dairy and nutrition stakeholders gathered to take part in guided tours of cutting-edge research laboratories at University of California, Davis and a facilitated dinner dialogue about dairy's role in advancing sustainable nutrition. The goal was for participants to learn from each other's expertise about dairy's role in nourishing people and protecting the planet and the importance of viewing sustainability with a wide lens.

The California Dairy Industry Background

Since the establishment of the dairy community in California almost two centuries¹ ago, dairy has become California's top agricultural commodity, generating over \$10 billion in sales per year² and employing approximately 180,000 people³ across the state. Dairy plays an integral role in many aspects of the U.S. food and farming culture, including human nutrition. In recent history, a focus on integrating principles of sustainability into nutrition guidance has increased.

Defining Sustainable Nutrition

Ensuring wholesome, nutrient-dense foods are accessible, affordable and culturally relevant while also preserving environmental resources and supporting local communities.

The University of California, Davis Tours

- **Barile/Bell Milk Processing Lab** – Daniela Barile, PhD, provided a detailed description of her research to “take milk apart to discover its powerful compounds.” Her work uses novel methods for the fractionation and recovery of bioactive milk components to potentially transform dairy waste streams into functional foods.
- **Mitloehner/Kebreab Livestock Methane Evaluation Lab** – Frank Mitloehner, PhD, and two graduate students led tours of covered corrals, known as “bovine bubbles,” and outdoor emission-measuring equipment. Dr. Mitloehner and the students provided detailed explanations of their experiments, looking at feed additives that can help reduce enteric methane emissions. The role of breed genetics and crossbreeding of dairy and beef cattle in reductions was also discussed.



Dinner Dialogue

Dairy plays an important role in sustainable nutrition through health, nutrition, culture, community, the environment and the economy. The participants explored each of these areas, the interconnectedness of these spheres and the importance of taking a holistic approach when considering dairy's future investments in sustainable nutrition. Attending the dinner dialogue were 46 participants, including dairy farmers, dairy industry leaders, environmental organization representatives, regulatory officials, dairy processors, service providers, nutrition professionals and public health experts. Following are key themes that emerged from the dialogues:



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Nutrition and Culture

- The dairy industry needs to be culturally responsive to meet the needs and preferences of changing demographics.
- Dairy has a unique ability to deliver affordable nutrition. School meals play an important role in nutrition education and provide nutrition to children.
- Consumers have information overload and struggle to decipher truthful nutrition information.
- Food is Medicine may provide new opportunities to collaborate with health care.
- Dairy products should remain as a healthful option in the Dietary Guidelines for Americans.
- Support is needed for continued nutrition science research and promotion of findings.
- The dairy industry should continue exploring solutions to address lactose intolerance.



Environment and Economy

- Government plays an important role in supporting innovations in sustainability.
- Collaboration between regulators and the dairy industry is important to find local tailored solutions.
- Market incentives need to drive environmental innovation.
- Environmental issues beyond methane need to be addressed, including water quality and access to safe drinking water.
- Innovative packaging is needed to achieve the state's waste reduction goals and appeal to the environmental values of many consumers.
- More research is needed to further develop methane reduction opportunities.
- Animal welfare considerations remain top of mind for consumers.



Interconnections

- Collaboration through communication must be a priority.
- The dairy industry should build bridges with new allies.
- The dairy industry needs more cohesiveness and collaboration among its stakeholders.

The themes that emerged from the dinner dialogues confirmed not only the integral role dairy plays in sustainable nutrition but also the market challenges the industry faces.

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Implications

- Continued government funding at the state and federal levels is needed to develop and promote adoption of new technologies to improve environmental protection.
- Dairy products face more market competition than ever before, and the dairy industry needs to invest in marketing and education with credible allies to highlight dairy's nutritional benefits and affordability.
- The array and complexity of challenges related to nutrition, the environment and cross-cultural communication may require recruitment of additional expertise and skills to ensure the dairy industry remains proactive.

Opportunities

- Changing demographics provide a market growth opportunity for a wider range of dairy products such as more fermented products and varieties of cheese and yogurts in different delivery formats.
- Growing emphasis and financial investment in Food is Medicine programming offers opportunities to build allies in the medical and health sectors.
- Implementing more sustainable farming practices can provide new revenue streams.
- Increasing public recognition of dairy's efforts to meet climate and other ecological and social challenges will strengthen efforts to grow a network of dairy industry allies.

Recommendations

- Focus on education and outreach to improve nutrition and agricultural literacy.
 - Keep medical professionals informed on the most up-to-date nutrition science.
 - Teach children about food and agriculture with specific focus on the dairy industry.
 - Educate decision-makers on the nutritional value of dairy and ways the dairy industry has taken proactive steps to improve its climate-smart practices.
- Use market segmentation to show dairy's unique value to specific populations.
- Engage and invest in community outreach.
- Continue to monitor trends and opportunities to be proactive.



1. Two centuries of prominence and personalities. Real California Milk website. Accessed April 24, 2024. https://www.californiadairyroom.com/Press_Kit/History_of_Dairy_industry
2. California agricultural production statistics. California Department of Food and Agriculture website. Accessed April 24, 2024. <https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/Statistics>
3. Keeping cows in California is good for people and planet. Dairy Cares website. Published September 6, 2022. Accessed April 24, 2024. <https://www.dairycares.com/post/keeping-cows-in-california-is-good-for-people-and-planet>