

The Future of the Dairy Industry

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Question: Describe your vision for the dairy industry over the next decade, and the role you plan to play in it.

The dairy industry is experiencing such an exciting and dynamic time right now. Many new possibilities have been created for young people, such as myself. With new technologies such as genomics and the faster-paced travel of information through social media, it can be difficult to keep up with the latest trends in the dairy industry at times. However, this fast pace also makes it possible to connect with people across the world that would not have been nearly as easy just ten years ago. With these advances in communication, sharing of information, and technological progress a person can learn more about different aspects of the dairy industry than ever before! From reading about the latest progress in Swiss genetics to seeing who judged a dairy show in Australia to watching a promotional agricultural video parody from farm kids in Kansas, there is a wealth of information available to anyone who wants to learn more about what is happening in the dairy industry.

With all of the advances in genetics and breeding technology as well as farm efficiency and changes in dairy processing procedures, the future of the dairy industry all boils down to one ultimate goal: selling our safe, wholesome, and fresh dairy products to consumers. The world population is continuing to grow by leaps and bounds, projected to reach over 7.58 billion people by 2020 from the 6.85 billion in 2010, according to statistics done by the U.S. Census Bureau. It is the responsibility of dairy farmers to ensure that they are able to keep up with consumer demand for milk products, and keep dairy as an integral part of a healthy diet. The latest My Plate guidelines released from the United States Department of Agriculture recommend three servings of low fat or fat free dairy products a day as

part of a healthy and balanced diet. However, as a person's age increases, their consumption of fluid milk has been shown to decrease. This means as dairy producers we need to offer innovative ideas for our dairy products other than fluid milk that are appealing to the consumer and are able to be easily and affordably incorporated into healthy meal plan recommendations. Of course, we still need to push to increase consumption of fluid milk, but we also need to consider the development and marketing of other dairy products as well. We need to tailor to meet our consumers' demands, and in the coming decade I feel confident that this will mean offering more low fat and fat free alternatives to dairy products such as yogurts and cheeses. One recent boom in the dairy industry has come from "Greek-style yogurt" and I think dairy producers need to take advantage of this in their marketing to consumers.

For the future of the dairy industry to remain profitable for the producer, there are some changes that should be made on the farm level. We are going to need to focus on breeding our cows for higher components such as fat and protein rather than volume of milk produced. The dairy industry will not be saved by a sudden increase in fluid milk consumption but from increased sales of processed dairy products such as Greek yogurt, low-fat cheese, and whey powder used in sports supplements and baby formula. We will not be able to help the consumer or ourselves as producers by flooding the market with fluid milk and subsequently lowering milk prices that producers receive when there is an excess of product and not enough consumer demand. Marketing needs to be focused on these other dairy products to increase consumer demand for them, while farmers focus their breeding

programs on taking advantage of higher components that are useful for processing products such as cheese and yogurt.

Over the next decade I plan on staying very involved in the dairy industry. I plan to graduate Virginia Tech in 2015 with a bachelor's degree in Food Science & Technology with a focus on dairy products. I am hoping to get more internship opportunities in both small and large-scale dairy products processing before and after graduation. This summer I am returning to Oak Spring Dairy, where I completed an internship last summer. Oak Spring is a small dairy operation that processes all of its milk into artisan cheeses. I am hoping to gain more experience in cheese making and managing a small business while getting to work with the consumers directly by selling our product at local farmer's markets. Upon completing this internship I would like to intern in a larger dairy processing plant to compare the experience to that of a small business. I would enjoy gaining experience in areas of quality assurance and new product development as well. I want to work directly with dairy producers to improve their profitability by producing the highest possible quality milk with the optimum components to be used for processing specialty products. I also think a lot of the future of the dairy industry is going to depend on new product development and innovations of existing products to better meet consumer demand. This is a very exciting area of research and development, and I hope to gain more insight in this field. My ultimate goal over the next decade is to work in product development with a large company such as Hilmar Cheese or Chobani Greek Yogurt in order to play my role in ensuring the profitability and sustainability of the dairy industry for the future.

Sources

2012 Virginia 4-H Dairy Quiz Bowl Materials. David R. Winston.

Choosemyplate.gov

U. S. Census Bureau, International Database. 2007.

<http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0762181.html>

Picture Caption: Me, in the cheese-house at Oak Spring Dairy. This internship is where I first got my interest in dairy products processing which led me to declare my Food Science & Technology major and choose this aspect of the dairy industry to work in.

