

July 31, 2017

Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy Celebrates 10 Years of Dairy Sustainability Advancement

by

Lisa Watson, Social Responsibility Officer at Innovation Center

This year the Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy celebrates its 10th anniversary of collaboration, alignment and action around the topics most important to our community and those we serve. U.S. dairy farmers took a bold step in 2008 and created the Innovation Center to unite dairy farmers, dairy companies and other organizations to address pre-competitive barriers, issues and opportunities that impact the entire industry. Consumer perceptions simply don't live in silos that segregate farmers from milk processors from dairy companies – people look to the whole chain for transparency about how their food is produced.

When this voluntary organization was formed, there was a recognition that initial success would depend on momentum from the top. Board members today include farmers, CEOs and Chairs of some of the industry's most influential organizations and companies – representing more than 60% of the U.S. milk supply. And through that leadership, the Innovation Center has helped to identify and respond to issues crucial to dairy's future, including sustainability.

The U.S. dairy community is proud of its strong foundation of environmental stewardship. Because of innovative dairy practices related to cow comfort, improved feed and genetics, and modern barn design, among others, producing a liter of milk in 2007 involved 65 percent less water, 90 percent less land, a 63 percent smaller carbon footprint and 76 percent less manure than it did in 1944.¹

Our heritage of dairy farming and processing is one of continuous improvement and the U.S. dairy community has demonstrated a persistent effort to become more environmentally sustainable. To identify opportunities to further reduce GHG emissions and provide a benchmark for the industry, the Innovation Center commissioned a life cycle assessment (LCA) in 2008 for fluid milk that was unprecedented in size and scope. The research demonstrates the U.S. dairy industry contributes approximately 2 percent of total U.S. GHG emissions— **the lowest average GHG intensity of milk production globally.**²

To help us further advance conservation and sustainable practices across the industry, the Innovation Center convened a multi-stakeholder group in 2008 and set an aggressive voluntary goal to reduce greenhouse gas emissions 25% by 2020. Today, the Dairy Sustainability Alliance meets in person twice each year and includes more than 100 dairy companies and organizations, academic and NGO's – as well as more than 40 dairy farmers. Members come together in a spirit of collaboration across the chain, to exchange ideas about responsible practices, to tackle shared challenges and to stimulate action.

In 2016, industry leaders expanded the Innovation Center's focus and put together a strategic plan grounded in social responsibility that includes five priority areas: animal care, sustainable nutrition, food safety, community, workforce and economic impact and environmental stewardship. We've organized

¹ J Anim Sci. Jun 2009;87(6):2160-7

² Int Dairy J. April 2013;31(suppl 1):S1-S100.

The U.S. Sustainability Alliance at www.thesustainabilityalliance.us

around these areas to channel attention and collaborative action to spark positive change and achieve positive societal impact. We're assessing where we stand today, and what we will need to do to get where we want to be five and ten years out.

For example, earlier this year the National Dairy Farmers Assuring Responsible Management (FARM) Animal Care program became the first and only livestock program to be recognized as compliant with the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) Animal Welfare Management / General Requirements and Guidance for Organizations in the Food Supply Chain. 98 % of the U.S. milk supply comes from farms that participate in this program.

From a global perspective, the Innovation Center is actively engaged in supporting the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by tracking global sustainability commitments through the Dairy Sustainability Framework as the U.S. regional aggregator. Through collaboration with National Dairy Council and other global partners, the Innovation Center is working to understand the complex issues around nutrition and sustainable food systems and is committed to taking an integrated approach to continuously improve the sustainability of dairy systems around the world. Learn more about how the U.S. Dairy Community is championing the SDGs in this [infographic](#) from the Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy and National Dairy Council.

For comments or further information please contact
David Green at david@thesustainabilityalliance.us

About the Author:



Lisa Watson joined the Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy as social responsibility officer in July 2016. In that capacity, she serves as an ambassador of the Innovation Center and provides counsel to its members to assist in addressing topics central to consumer trust in dairy. She resides in Washington, DC.

Note from the editor:

The U.S. Sustainability Alliance (USSA) comprising of American farmers, fishermen and foresters was formed with the recognition that sustainability is not an arbitrary threshold, but rather a commitment to continuous improvement and innovation. A goal of the Alliance is to share U.S. stewardship and sustainability practices with colleagues and counterparts across the world for greater mutual understanding of resource management practices.

¹ J Anim Sci. Jun 2009;87(6):2160-7

² Int Dairy J. April 2013;31(suppl 1):S1-S100.