



Women in Leadership



Their voices, ideas and vision for the future of cheese and dairy.

Katie Davey is executive director at Dairy Institute of California.

What leadership style do you feel has garnered a positive response throughout your career?

Throughout my career I have found that different situations and challenges call for different leadership approaches. I consider myself to be more of a situational leader, who can easily respond to various situations using different leadership styles as appropriate. When I was a chief of staff to Kevin Faulconer, the former mayor of San Diego, I enjoyed coaching our newer team members to help them develop their people, policy and communication skills. As the executive director of the Dairy Institute, it's important to use a democratic management style. In this role, my job is to serve our members and work with them to build consensus to advance the industry.

Do you feel women in the industry are well-represented in trade organizations, educational content and the media? Where do you see gaps?

As the second woman to serve as the executive director of Dairy Institute of California, I am pleased to be surrounded by other great female leaders in the dairy, agriculture and food manufacturing industry.

California has long been a leader in advancing women into positions of leadership.

It has been a pleasure to work with the secretary of the California Department of Food and Agriculture, Karen Ross, as well as Amy DeLisio, CEO of Dairy Council of California, Veronique Lagrange, director of the California Dairy Innovation Center, Denise Mullinax, executive director of the California Dairy Research Foundation, Emily Rooney, president of Agricultural Council of California, and Trudi Hughes, president and CEO of the California League of Food Producers on behalf of California's dairy industry.

There is always room for more women leaders at the table, and it is up to us to work collaboratively to help other women develop their skills to join us.

Organizations and groups focused on career development for women play an important role in growing the group. I have enjoyed the opportunity to mentor young professional women at the beginning of their careers through She Share's Mentorship Program, which was founded by California's First Lady Maria Shriver. I have also loved participating in the International Dairy Foods Association's Women in Dairy network, which brings women together in the dairy processing industry to focus on leadership and professional development, networking and mentorship.

Who are some dairy industry leaders that inspire you? Have you had any mentors in the industry, and how have they helped you along your career journey?

I am truly inspired by Dairy Institute's member companies who make world-class dairy products. The hard work and dedication they put into bringing high-quality dairy products to market and their commitment to innovation and sustainability, all while figuring out ways to thrive in California's challenging business climate, is impressive.

I am in my first year on the job as Dairy Institute's executive director. I came into this role with a strong background in advocacy and a wealth of experience working for different trade associations across a variety of industries. I have been so blessed to work closely with and receive guidance and support from the president of Dairy Institute's board of directors, Mike Newell from HP Hood, Alison Krebs with Leprino, Ken Gott, president and COO of Clover Sonoma, and my predecessor, who recently retired, Dr. Bill Schiek. Coming into the dairy industry has been an incredible transition for me and I am so thankful to the leaders on my board of directors for their support.

What is a strategy you've utilized to make sure you, and other women in your organization, are heard?

When faced with challenges, I utilize my political expertise to recognize a threat and build a coalition to mobilize into action.

California recently issued a set of regulations to implement legislation to prohibit the use of the "chasing arrow" recycling symbol on products and packaging, unless the item meets certain recycling thresholds. The good news was PET #1 and HDPE #2 met the recyclability criteria. The bad news is gable-top cartons, aseptic containers and steel cans/lids did not meet the criteria to maintain the recycling symbol.

This is a huge problem for dairy processors who utilize gable-top cartons, aseptic containers and steel cans/lids for their products. If these packaging items lose their recyclability designation, waste haulers will stop collecting them at curbside recycling, leading to plummeting recycling rates. This is not something you want, going into the SB 54 Extended Producer Responsibility framework where all single-use product packaging must be 100% recyclable by 2032 or else face a ban from California's market. This is obviously a predicament for the dairy industry. When we realized the issue at hand and the major impact this would have upon dairy processors, we formed a coalition with the Carton Council to advocate for gable-top cartons and aseptic containers to maintain the recycling designation.

Thankfully, legislation has been introduced in California to provide an on ramp to SB 343 for products trending toward recycling such as gable-top cartons, aseptic containers and steel cans/lids so they can continue to use the "chasing arrow" recycling symbol.

What is a key industry insight you'd share with yourself 10 years ago if you could?

Ten years ago, I had no idea I would have the privilege of working in California's dairy industry on behalf of dairy processors. My unique background in the biotechnology and restaurant industry prepared me for the diverse set of challenges facing dairy processors in California — from legislation and regulations impacting our manufacturing facilities to food and beverage packaging issues.

Please share a time when you felt your insights presented a unique solution to a challenge at a company or organization.

California legislators are infamous for passing legislation that requires state

agencies to develop assessments or create plans to achieve goals that often turn into far-reaching regulations.

This year's latest attempt was AB 2083, which required the California Energy Commission to develop an assessment and a strategy to decarbonize industrial emissions by 85% below 1990 levels by the year 2045. While for some this might look like legislation to require a state agency to merely conduct a study, my experience with similar legislation gave me the insight to understand this was really about crafting a regulation to force industrial food manufacturers and dairy processors to transition the entire energy load of their plants to all-electric-powered equipment.

Switching to all-electric manufacturing equipment would be incredibly expensive, if not cost prohibitive, for a dairy processor. This is on top of the current lack of available electricity in California to power all the newly installed electric manufacturing equipment. Our member companies who want to expand in California are currently being told by their local utility that they are unable to supply them with additional power to meet the increased demand. So how would our industry ever be able to go all electric?

California has been the nation's leading dairy state since 1993, when it surpassed Wisconsin in milk production. California is ranked first in the U.S. in the production of milk, butter, ice cream and nonfat dry milk. Our dairy processor members are an important part of California's agricultural industry and manufacturing base.

On behalf of our processor members, Dairy Institute was able to have productive conversations with our legislators in California to explain to them the important role our industry plays with regard to the nation's dairy supply and the financial impact this kind of legislation would place on California's dairy processors. As a result, the legislation was amended to remove the reduction goal and incorporate an evaluation into the California Air Resources Board's next Scoping Plan. A successful outcome was achieved for our members due to my prior experience dealing with similar goal-setting legislation. CMN