



Legacy & Leadership

David Lenzmeier is CEO of Milk Specialties Global, Eden Prairie, Minnesota. He has spent his entire life in the dairy industry.

Lenzmeier grew up on a dairy farm in Kimball, Minnesota. His father, Mickey, served on the board of directors of Litchfield, Minnesota-based First District Association, a co-op that started providing whey protein in the late 1970s. It was then that Lenzmeier's interest in dairy processing was created.

He began his professional career in quality/operations/business development for First District. In 1999, Lenzmeier co-founded Protient, a manufacturer of specialty whey protein, and started the business as its president and first employee. He partnered with Milk Specialties Global starting in June 2008 as the president of the newly formed food division. Since he joined Milk Specialties Global, the company has grown four locations in the upper Midwest to more than 920 employees at 11 national locations.

Milk Specialties Global (MSG) is an industry-leading manufacturer of innovative nutritional ingredients for the health and wellness industry, with certified manufacturing facilities in Wisconsin, Minnesota, Nebraska, Illinois and California. The core of MSG's business is in value-added dairy ingredients including whey protein concentrate, isolate, hydrolysate and specialty fractions, as well as milk protein, micellar casein and lactose. Milk Specialties Global also manufactures products that support animal nutrition including milk replacer and energy booster supplements.

Lenzmeier became a member of the Hendrickson Foundation Board in 2014 and chairman in 2021. The foundation allows people with special needs the opportunity to play hockey. He also is an executive board member of the American Dairy Products Institute.

Q How is the dairy industry uniquely positioned as an essential industry to feed the nation and world during the COVID-19 crisis?

A The United States dairy industry is positioned to acclimate to the COVID-19 crisis because of the resiliency of U.S. dairy farmers and the ingenuity of U.S. processors. Working in an essential industry allows Milk Specialties to fluctuate with consumer demand, even during challenging times like the COVID-19 pandemic. With more and more consumers wanting to improve their lifestyles and diets following the pandemic, dairy products are very well placed to support consumer needs, given their high nutrient density and availability. Shelf-stable SKUs are becoming more and more available, enabling delivery of quality products to every corner of the earth.

Q How is the coronavirus pandemic affecting marketing messaging and positioning for dairy products?

A The COVID pandemic marketing position reinforces the importance of the superior nutritional benefits of dairy products as a single source for essential nutrients.

COVID-19 has highlighted how important maintaining a good base level of health is. This includes exercising regularly, maintaining a healthy weight and eating a well-balanced diet. Dairy can be an integral part of supporting that base level by providing key nutrients, including high-quality protein, that support many health benefits. It is a key time to remind and educate consumers of these benefits, which are easily found in readily available

products. Furthermore, certain protein fractions—such as lactoferrin, milk fat globule membrane and alpha-lactalbumin—have been shown to have immune-supporting properties, including being both antiviral and antibacterial.

Q As a leading manufacturer of dairy ingredients, please discuss a particular product launch that you felt was “ahead of the curve?”

A Milk Specialties Global's innovative product, PRObev, has proven to be ahead of the times in this volatile market. PRObev is a heat-stable whey protein isolate that is clear in solution over a wide pH range. PRObev supports a scope of beverage manufacturers looking for exceptional taste with a strong nutritional profile to a variety of water-based beverage and gel applications, including RTD (ready to drink) protein waters, juice fortification, gels, gummies and ice pops. PRObev has proven to be “ahead of the curve” because it fits the market niche in a variety of different applications and fits consumer demands.

Q Please discuss the importance of exports as part of your business model—why is it imperative to look beyond the U.S. market?

A Being at the forefront of growing markets allows Milk Specialties to grow with our customers. With MSG's interconnected global market, working with multiple countries and multiple regions helps us to be more nimble in our sales portfolio. Looking beyond the U.S. border gives MSG the opportunity to creatively place dairy proteins into new retail markets.

U.S. dairy farmers are growing milk production faster than the increase in demand/consumption here in the U.S. Therefore, we must tap into the demand of a growing and evolving global consumer in order to allow our farmers and processors to grow.

Q What is one of the key trends in dairy ingredients today that you think will last?

A Consuming dairy for better immunity.

Q How can the industry continue to position dairy as the “premiere choice” for consumers among competing protein sources?

A 1. Reinforcing to consumers that dairy provides a complete amino acid profile that is readily available and delivers superior taste and texture.

2. Educating consumers on the health benefits of the different types of dairy proteins, as well as where to find these in products.

3. Highlighting the importance of looking beyond just grams of protein per serving.

4. Continuing to inform consumers of the actions the dairy industry has and is taking towards becoming more sustainable and reducing our environmental footprint.

Q How has thinking outside the box served you well in establishing your company?

A Thinking outside of the box is imperative to success in any business and has allowed MSG to evolve with consumer demands and fluctuate with the current market. Being nimble enables us to move with the market and customer demands as well as take an innovative approach to supply chain and operations, which allow us to grow quickly to meet customer needs.

Q How do you encourage creative thinking within your organization?

A Milk Specialties Global encourages creative thinking within our organization by fostering an entrepreneurial spirit in all employees. We recognize employees

who demonstrate our company values (entrepreneurial spirit and continuous improvement being two of them) through our peer-to-peer employee recognition program. Furthermore, we look to our employees in all areas of the organization and at all levels to bring up new ideas or ways to do things differently. These are a couple of the reasons why so many employees thrive and appreciate the culture in our organization—for the simple fact that they have an opportunity to make an impact.

Q What has been your favorite thing about working in the cheese and dairy industry?

A Milk Specialties Global has a solution-focused partnership within the dairy industry, and great relationships are formed within the industry. It is the perishable nature of dairy products that makes the industry unique at times; we must partner and support a competitor for the greater good of the industry. We have an “in it together” mentality, and we work together to advance dairy as a whole and continue industry-driven cohesion.

Q Please discuss the benefits of collaboration among industry leaders versus the need to “protect your brand.”

A The benefit of collaboration is that our collective voice is bigger than the individual. We must continue to come together as an industry to drive forward through innovation, promoting nutritional benefits, aligning on how to lower environmental impact and inform consumers of these areas.

The Strong Inside campaign is a great example of where the industry has pulled together for a larger cause—to educate and empower consumers to choose proteins from milk so they can achieve their health and wellbeing goals. No single company can do this by themselves, and it pulls in strengths from across the industry rather than just one organization.

Q What, in your opinion, does the dairy industry need to do to attract the next generation of leaders?

A Be vocal about our successes and innovations and transparent on how we operate. CMN