



Women in Leadership



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

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In an industry with continuous innovation, what inspires you to think creatively and foster creativity among those in your organization?

For me, inspiration comes from many sources: tireless reading, competitive scouting, global trends and patent reviews, and much more. It starts with curiosity and a dedication of time and curiosity to look outside the category at shifts in consumer behaviors, global signals, marketplace trends, breakthroughs in science and technology, etc. After decades, dairy continues as a staple in people's lives with more than 90% penetration across most segments in U.S. households. That makes us a major target for competition. As a staff, and for the broader dairy community, we've got to flip the script and shift our mindset from target to aggressor. Increasingly, we're looking to adjacent, competitor and other major retail categories for our share of incremental growth. My expectation is for each of us working for farmers, in whatever capacity, to adopt an innovative, challenger mindset. And that we balance our day-to-day responsibilities with a passion to discover what's next, to address people's evolving lifestyles and needs, and to position dairy as a health and nutrition solution, a source of renewable energy and a contributor to a healthy community and economy.

Is there a particular marketing campaign or facet of the dairy checkoff program you were involved with launching that you're particularly proud of?

Dairy farmers through the dairy checkoff founded the Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy in 2008, and I am so proud to be a part of the launch and ongoing efforts since that time. The Innovation Center has proven to be the right organization at the right time to convene leaders from across the dairy value chain to address issues and opportunities that are bigger

than any one company or product sector to take on alone. The work is approached on a pre-competitive basis in areas the dairy community, customers and consumers care about — animal care, food safety, nutrition and health, the environment and community contributions. Almost 15 years later, we are thankful for farmers' foresight as these social responsibility topics are of growing importance to U.S. dairy's ability to operate and sell its products across the globe.

Do you feel female leadership is well-reflected on the boards of national dairy organizations like Dairy Management Inc., etc.?

Over my tenure at DMI, I have seen a significant evolution in the composition of our farmer boards. I was there when the first female, Kimberly Clauss from California, was named chair of the National Dairy Promotion & Research Board. Today, about 30% of our board, and board advisors, are female, and women are well represented on boards throughout our state and regional network. And given the family nature of the business, I've also seen that behind every male board leader there likely stands a dedicated wife, mother, grandmother, daughter or sister who shares in the leadership and hard work that it takes to produce milk. While female representation is important, diversity comes in many forms, including age, region and farm practice. We're increasingly looking at the role advisors can play in bringing further thought and cultural diversity into the board room as I'm convinced our relevance as a category depends on our understanding of diverse populations.

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

I consider myself a relational leader and, for me, that means finding common ground. It's listening and understanding what's on the minds of the audience or other person, be it a farmer, staff member, partner or stranger. Although listening can sound like a passive function, it's far from it. It's actually the best

communications technique to use in meeting someone where they are and understanding their perspectives as you consider and communicate your own position.

What are your tricks for maintaining a good work/life balance?

Remote and hybrid work situations intertwine work and life more closely and, at the same time, offer people more flexibility. I use family, friends and exercise to balance my time. It's important to check in on my family and the people I care about. And when working from home, I take breaks between meetings and calls to get in a walk or lift weights in the basement. The physical exertion is good for clearing my head.

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What do you feel are some of the most important qualities of a successful leader?

I have been doing a lot of reading about resilience lately. In a post-pandemic, volatile environment, resilience or grit is definitely an important quality and requires patience, perseverance, passion, consistency and tenacity. Other characteristics I believe are important in today's culture include emotional intelligence, transparency, decisiveness and courage. It's important to not let the issues

overwhelm you, to breathe and to reframe how you approach problems or situations to find unexpected or productive solutions.

How can the industry motivate the next generation of women to pursue a career in dairy?

Dairy is such an amazing and complex category with many facets. It offers an array of opportunities to build a career in science, innovation, technology, insights, data management, marketing communications and so many other fields. Collectively, we've got to modernize our approach to university and trade schools, target new and different academic disciplines and experiences, and present the category's innovative, fast-paced and compelling culture. Dairy has had sustained success in terms of its relevance and importance to society and to nutrient-rich diets. I'm excited about the opportunities for women in dairy and our ability to attract a diverse next-generation workforce that brings new insights, culture, experiences and expectations, which will only make us more effective at meeting the needs of the future consumer.

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

"Figures lie, and liars figure." Don't always believe what you read and hear, especially in today's big data environment. Understand the agenda behind a certain position or narrative before you draw conclusions.

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

I think anyone who works on behalf of farmers draws inspiration from them. They inspire us every day with their commitment to feed people across the U.S. and the world. It is a tireless, 24/7/365 passion that requires an innovative mindset, nimble problem-solving and decision-making, and stamina. CMN