



Women in Leadership



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

Amy DeLisio is CEO of the Dairy Council of California.

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

My leadership style is adaptive, collaborative and comfortable with change management. I do my best to take stock of projects and match them with individuals' strengths, passions and interests. Distributing leadership roles in this way has created engagement and a slew of new ideas, which is so important for getting people on board with plans and projects, and helping them feel like they own their piece. Prioritizing people's strengths and engaging them in dialogue helps build a collaborative environment and trust by allowing people to have a voice in what we're doing.

On a personal front, I'm strategic and always trying to think about the big picture and big ideas to help us advance. This relies on being flexible, willing to take calculated risks and having an innate openness to new ideas and ways of thinking. Being comfortable with change and knowing that we can adapt is so important to growing individually, as an organization and as an industry.

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

Within Dairy Council of California, we have strong female representation in leadership. I also see this across other dairy agencies, but there are still gaps in the industry overall, particularly within production and processing. That said, the dairy industry is taking huge strides to get women into those leadership roles.

Also, unfortunately, the dairy industry — like various other sectors — still lacks other types of diversity in the C-suite. Overall, women only hold about 20% and women of color hold only about 7% of leadership roles across industries.

Can you please talk a bit about launching a new logo and identity for Dairy Council of California under your leadership?

As Dairy Council of California began shifting some of our key focus lenses and priorities, we took a moment to think about

what our logo really means — to us and our audiences.

Our former logo wasn't always clear, so it felt like the right time to modernize our look and feel. We went through an intentional process to hear from our staff, board members and key partners about what Dairy Council of California does well and how we make them feel. It was important to communicate that Dairy Council of California and the dairy industry as a whole have a bright future ahead.

Our new logo honors Dairy Council of California's strong history and represents optimism as the industry continues to carve out an important place in sustainable nutrition.

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

The key is having an open-door policy and putting women in positions of leadership, while also understanding that leadership goes beyond just a title. We have a lot of women in our organization who, regardless of their title, have great ideas. I encourage open dialogue and believe that ideas can come from anyone, at any level.

Creating those opportunities for ideas and feedback, while simultaneously putting women in positions of organizational leadership, helps encourage other women to feel comfortable speaking up. We hire people for their expertise. I want to make sure we're utilizing all of those voices so we can be as successful as possible.

When I first came into my role at Dairy Council of California, I made it a priority to meet with all our internal team members to understand how they were feeling about the organization. I wanted to hear their feedback on how things were going and whether there were any changes they would suggest. Based on listening and observing, I was able to implement some internal restructuring, recenter our goals and identify new priorities that are critical for both our industry and our staff. This process allowed me to build trust with the team and show them that I'm listening and want to hear what they have to say.

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

When I first started at Dairy Council of California, I didn't have much experience in agriculture, but I did have a unique perspective from my

time working in public health. Having experience in nutrition and public health, working with both state and local entities, gave me valuable insight into programs, communities and partnership building. This experience allowed us to evolve in how we reach families, better tailor our messaging to the public and ensure that we're partnering with organizations that share our values.

As an example, through our First 1,000 Days project, we teamed up with a foundation in the Central Valley of California on a program that reaches families with young children and gives them buying power to purchase nutritious dairy foods to alleviate some of the food insecurity they're experiencing. The partnership was a unique approach that allowed us to not only ensure more families have access to dairy foods, but also demonstrate thought leadership and build a case to potentially influence nutrition programs and policies in the future.

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

We need to demonstrate the breadth of opportunities that agriculture and dairy hold for women. We offer roles in communication, marketing, technology, farming and innovation, but we need to creatively market to the next generation of women and get them to think about dairy as a career.

There are opportunities to plug into S.T.E.M. programming, mentorship programs and universities to show young women that the dairy industry values them and wants to see them in this space. We can also start positioning agriculture as a field of choice earlier on — in high school, middle school and early education.

I encourage young women interested in pursuing agriculture or the dairy industry to reach out to other women who work in the field.

What do you think traditionally has been a barrier to women entering or advancing in the dairy industry? How have women worked to overcome these barriers and build more opportunities for new generations?

There are many women who have come along and broken down barriers before me. Dairy Council of California has a long history of women CEOs, so we have a legacy of female leadership.

I believe there have been more efforts in recent years to make women feel welcome in the dairy industry at large. There has been a conscious effort to diversify the voices in the room and a big drive to get women into S.T.E.M. careers, including agriculture.

The next step is having young women see agriculture and dairy as an opportunity for them to utilize their skills and be part of an important industry with a big purpose: elevating health and alleviating hunger.

What can companies and organizations in the dairy industry do to further diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) in their hiring and career advancement practices?

One of the most important things an organization can do is create a culture that values diversity, equity and inclusion. At Dairy Council of California, we have an internal DEI workgroup as a way to talk about our values and as a forum for discussion about why DEI is so important for a positive workplace.

Professional development and training are also critical, along with the way job descriptions and postings are written and promoted. Once diverse candidates are on board, mentorship is also an important component.

DEI is important not only internally, but also in terms of thinking about our target audiences. It is widely known that obesity and other chronic diseases disproportionately affect low-resource communities, communities of color and other historically marginalized groups, which often have less access to nutritious foods and credible nutrition education.

By appreciating the influence of ethnicity, culture, religion and education on food choices, and by providing tailored nutrition education messages, we can support healthier children and families who see dairy foods as an essential part of healthy, sustainable daily eating patterns. CMN