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Expert: Dairy farmers should be ready to counter criticism

Farmers can serve as advocates to dispel misinformation

By **MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI**
Capital Press



Gass

With multiple controversies swirling around milk production, dairy farmers should be prepared to answer criticisms, persuasion expert Robert Gass says.

"You're in the ideal position to serve as advocates for these issues," Gass, a communications professor at Califor-

nia State University, told the recent Oregon Dairy Farmers Association convention in Salem, Ore.

The dairy industry faces many contentious topics, including animal welfare, antibiotic use, greenhouse gas emissions and proper

nutrition, he said.

Consumers are prone to accept misinformation that farmers have the authority to dispel, particularly if they use the right rhetorical tools, said Gass.

Farmers can be effective in defending the dairy industry if they see the criticism as an opening to share information and don't allow the debate to become adversarial, he said.

"That's a chance for you to show what you know," Gass said.

When encountering a challenge, the farmer should try to find some common ground with the other person, he said.

There may be a conflicting perspectives on a topic, but farmers should point out that they share the same goals — preserving the environment and making healthful products, Gass said.

Once this "commonality" is established, Gass said the

farmer should respond with factual evidence and then explain why it's important.

A concise approach is more effective at getting the point across than a "stream of consciousness" retort, he said. For example:

• If someone calls for removing flavored milk from school lunches, the farmer can point out that such a measure would reduce milk consumption among children. The effect is that kids will simply drink soda and miss out on the

protein and calcium in milk.

• The argument that livestock production causes methane emissions can be countered with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's finding that all types of agriculture account for just 10 percent of greenhouse gases. The conclusion is that other sources of emissions play a much bigger role in climate change and often occur in foreign countries.

"Not much the U.S. can do about that, even if it stopped all agriculture," Gass said.

S. Korea presents opportunities for U.S. dairy products

By **RICHARD SMITH**
For the Capital Press

With a bilateral free trade agreement, a growing appetite for western cuisine and an increasingly uncompetitive local dairy industry, U.S. dairy exports to South Korea will continue to grow in the coming years, the representative for the U.S. Dairy Export Council says.

That would especially be true for cheese, whose total consumption is increasing 10 percent annually, said Yoon-Sang Lee, president of the Seoul public relations and marketing firm Intnet.

Intnet also represents the California Raisin Administrative Committee.

But U.S. production of cheese and butter must be adjusted to local tastes, as the products contain more sodium than the level to which South Koreans are accustomed, Lee said.

"If U.S. suppliers could lower the sodium level, there would be greater opportunities for market penetration," he said.

On the other hand, prospects are weak for feed ingredients as the South Korean livestock industry is expected to remain stagnant or decline as meat im-

ports increase, Lee said.

South Korea's stock of powdered milk is at a 12-year high because of an oversupply and shrinking demand, the daily JoongAng Ilbo reported. The newspaper reported the Korea Dairy Committee said the amount of stored powdered milk had reached 15,554 tons last June, the highest level since November 2002.

But that is because the supply is governed by subsidies where farmers producing milk are making a profit, Lee told Capital Press.

"Supply is continuing despite low demand, and thus we are seeing an increase in the stock of milk powder," he said.

Demand for U.S. milk powder is not affected by the current local milk powder situation, Lee said.

"It is mainly affected by the tariff and thus future export of U.S. milk powder would mainly rely on the KORUS FTA quota schedule," he said.

Prospects for U.S. extended shelf life milk are stronger, but it would take another five years or more for the price to be competitive (as the tariff goes down under the FTA), Lee said.

Low-lignin alfalfa eases quality-yield trade-off

By **CAROL RYAN DUMAS**
Capital Press

BURLEY, Idaho — Alfalfa growers might soon not have to give in to that age-old compromise of quality or yield with new reduced lignin varieties that preserve quality with more tonnage and increased harvest flexibility.

Lignin is a complex organic compound that binds cellulose fibers and hardens and strengthens the cell walls of plants, increasing as plants mature to give structural support as plants become taller. As lignin builds, forage quality and animal digestibility decline.

Reduced lignin alfalfa varieties offer improved quality by slowing down lignin buildup in maturing alfalfa, allowing producers to extend harvest to increase yield while maintaining quality, plant breeders told growers at the Idaho Hay and Forage annual convention here Feb. 28.

Alforex Seeds has developed two low-lignin varieties using conventional plant breeding that reduce lignin 7 percent to 10 percent compared with conventional varieties, said Don Miller, director of product development for Alforex.

Both varieties maintain yield and stand persistence and offer multiple pest resistance with the added benefits of lower lignin — a good package, he said.



Carol Ryan Dumas/Capital Press

Don Miller, director of product development for Alforex Seeds, tells producers about the benefits offered by the company's low-lignin alfalfa variety during the annual Idaho Hay and Forage convention in Burley on Feb. 27.

Growers who typically harvest at 28 days for high quality have the potential to get even better quality with a 28-day harvest. But they can also get the same high quality as conventional varieties harvested at 28 days harvesting at 35 days to gain yield, he said.

The varieties offer "more tonnage without sacrificing quality (and) any time you have a better-quality feed, you have more milk, more beef," he said.

In addition, the extra seven days to harvest provide the flexibility to delay harvest and avoid rain damage. And the reduced lignin varieties show no increase in lodging compared with conventional varieties, he said.

"They are top-of-the-line varieties, we just added one more trait," he said.

Alforex Seeds' two High-Gest varieties — one dormant and one semi-dormant — are the first commercially available low-lignin alfalfa

varieties and are now available to growers. Varieties with additional dormancies will be developed for future release, he said.

Forage Genetics International (FGI) has also been developing a reduced lignin trait for alfalfa and has received USDA approval for its transgenic trait developed through a partnership of government, industry and private non-profit organizations. Limited commercial introduction is expected in 2016.

More than a dozen years of multi-state trials of alfalfa with FGI's HarvXtra trait showed a 15 to 20 percent decrease in lignin and a 10 to 15 percent increase in neutral detergent fiber digestibility and relative forage quality compared with commercial check crops, said Peter Reisen, FGI director of plant breeding.

The U.S. Dairy Forage Research Center estimates a 10 percent increase in fiber digestibility would increase U.S. milk and beef production by \$350 million annually and decrease manure production by 2.8 million tons per year, Reisen said.

In addition to offering higher quality, better yield and harvest flexibility, the longer harvest schedule offered by reduced lignin varieties puts less stress on plants with the potential of increasing stand life, Reisen and Miller said.

Cash dairy markets end February mixed

By **LEE MIELKE**
For the Capital Press

The block Cheddar cheese price closed the last week of February at \$1.5450 per pound, unchanged on the week but 67 3/4-cents below a year ago and 1 1/4 cents higher on the month. They were unchanged Monday and Tuesday.

The Cheddar barrels finished at \$1.4925, up three-quarter-cents on the week, 70 3/4-cents below a year ago and down 1 1/4-cents on the month. The barrels were also unchanged Monday and Tuesday. Seven cars of block traded hands last week and

Dairy Markets

Lee Mielke



10 of barrel.

Cash butter started last week heading south but rallied Thursday and Friday and closed Friday at \$1.6950 per pound, still down 2 3/4-cents on the week, 18 1/2-cents below a year ago, and 5 1/2-cents lower on the month. The spot butter jumped a hefty 8 1/2-cents Monday but gave back 3 cents Tuesday and closed at \$1.75. Twenty-three cars were sold last week, up from 12 the previous week. As of Tuesday, 32 cars had sold already this week.

Cash Grade A nonfat dry milk continued the slide that began the week before last but rallied some on Wednesday, slipped Thursday, and then rebounded Friday, closing at \$1.1550 per pound, up 7 cents on the day, 4 1/2-cents on the week, 8 1/2-cents higher on the month, and the highest it has been since Nov. 19, 2014. The powder was unchanged Monday but gave back 3 cents Tuesday, closing at \$1.1250. Thirty-five cars were sold last week, 19 on Friday alone, up from 24 the previous week and 44 the week before that.

California 4b milk up 3 cents

The California Department of Food and Agriculture announced the state's February 4b cheese milk price Monday at \$13.78 per hundredweight, up 3 cents from January but an eye-popping \$7.36 below February 2014. The small rebound reverses four weeks of decline but is \$8.61 below the record high \$22.39 in September 2014. It put the two-month average at \$13.77, down from \$20.73 a year ago and compares to \$15.63 in 2013.

The February 4a butter-powder milk price is \$13.46, up 37 cents from Jan-

uary but \$9.62 below a year ago. Its two-month average now stands at \$13.28, down from \$22.61 a year ago and compares to \$17.55 in 2013. Comparable Federal order prices are announced by USDA on Wednesday.

Global auction up 1.1 percent

Tuesday's Global Dairy Trade auction saw the weighted average for all products jump 1.1 percent, following a 10.1 percent jump on February 17. It is the sixth consecutive event of gain though the smallest since the January 20 event.

The gains were again led by Cheddar cheese, up 10.8 percent, following a 16.8 percent increase in the Feb. 17 event. Butter milk powder was next, up 6.8 percent, following a 1.9 percent increase last time. Next was skim milk powder, up 5.9 percent, which follows a 5.7 percent jump last time. Butter was up 2.5 percent, following a 1.1 percent increase last time.

Declines were led by anhydrous milkfat, down 2.2 percent. It was up 6.4 percent last time. Whole milk powder followed, down 1.0 percent, after a 13.7 percent jump in the last event, and rennet casein rounded out the losses, down 0.7 percent, following a 1.2 percent increase last time.

FC Stone reports the average GDT butter price equated to about \$1.7744 per pound U.S., up from \$1.7340 in the Feb. 17 event. Contrast that to CME butter, which closed Tuesday at \$1.75. The GDT Cheddar cheese average was \$1.5318 per pound U.S., up from \$1.3854. The U.S. block Cheddar CME price closed Tuesday at \$1.5450/lb. GDT skim milk powder, at \$1.3314 per pound U.S., is up from \$1.2445, and the whole milk powder average at \$1.4702 U.S. is down from \$1.4844 in the last event. The CME Grade A nonfat dry milk price closed Tuesday at \$1.1250.

Dairy Farmer owned co-ops control 80% of U.S. produced milk.

About 180,000 dairies have gone out of business since 1980, over 1,600 in 2014 alone.

Dairy Farmer owned processing co-ops have been ineffective at reversing this trend.

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