

Dairy Council of California connects public, ag

By JULIA HOLLISTER
For the Capital Press

Ninety-eight years ago California's dairy families and milk processors saw the need to showcase the nutritional value of milk and dairy foods.

One vehicle they developed to do that is the Mobile Dairy Classroom.

Combined with training programs and online tools, they can now reach millions in California and throughout the nation.

The Mobile Dairy Classroom started in the 1930s when Clarence Michaels of Edgemar Farms customized a trailer to bring a cow and calf on school visits in the Los Angeles area.

The assemblies based on the Mobile Dairy Classroom are California's original Farm to School program, said Efrain Valenzuela, the Dairy Council's Mobile Dairy Classroom manager.

"Today six instructors with agricultural and education backgrounds across the state bring the custom-built units to elementary schools and Ag Days during the school



Dairy Council of California

Students pet a calf during a visit from the Dairy Council of California's Mobile Dairy Classroom. The program reaches 450,000 children and adults each year.

year," Valenzuela said. "This valuable program reaches 450,000 children and adults each year."

Since 1919, the Dairy Council has developed other programs to partner with educators, health professionals and communities to elevate the health of children and parents through the pursuit of healthy, balanced eating habits, he said.

That includes drinking milk and eating dairy foods, he said.

The Dairy Council is a marketing order with oversight from the California Department of Food and Agriculture.

All of California's dairy families and milk processing companies contribute to fund the outreach efforts.

"We offer classroom nu-

trition education lessons for grades K-12 that are free to California teachers," Valenzuela said. "We also offer nutrition education booklets to health professionals to assist adults and parents in making healthy eating choices and raising children to be healthy eaters."

In addition, the Dairy Council is part of the Smarter Lunchrooms Movement of California, Local School Wellness Policy Collaboratives and other community outreach programs, he said.

Currently, the council is reaching out to teachers, school food service professionals, healthcare workers and others to raise awareness and boost participation in the free summer meals programs funded by USDA.

Only about 15 percent of students who rely on free and reduced-price meals at school take advantage of summer meals, which offer free breakfast, lunch and snacks to all kids 18 and under — no paperwork or documentation required — when school is out of session.

"Every breakfast and lunch follows healthy meal standards," he said.



Juli Labhart cleans a machine used to churn gelato at the Bontà Natural Artisan Gelato creamery in east Bend, Ore.

Marina Riker/For the Capital Press

Couple develops taste for making gelato

By MARINA RIKER
For the Capital Press

Jeff and Juli Labhart knew they wanted to start their own business. But they had no idea what they wanted to do.

The two were living in Bend, Ore., when they decided to take a break from their day jobs and backpack around the world for a year. While exploring new countries and cultures, the two were always on the lookout for new places to fill their appetite for sweets — especially for gelato.

Juli Labhart, who is allergic to gluten and corn, found it easier to satisfy her cravings abroad, where the frozen treat was more likely to be made without such ingredients.

"At the time, there were only a couple main ice cream companies that I could eat (in the United States)," said Labhart. "I was like, why are we behind on this?"

When the husband-and-wife team returned to the U.S. a year later, they enrolled in classes taught by gelato-making masters in hopes of being able to craft the dessert from local ingredients back in Bend.

Nearly a decade has passed since then, and business is booming at Bontà Natural Artisan Gelato. What started as a gig selling pints at the local farmers' market has turned into a 20-employee company equipped with its own creamery. The Labharts run a scoop shop in downtown Bend, and offer their pints for sale in stores ranging from Albertsons to Whole Foods.

"We were new to the food industry, so we had to do a lot of research," said Jeff Labhart. "It took a while to figure all of it out."

Today, the company uses 240 gallons of milk a week to produce up to 3 gallons of gelato every 10 minutes at the creamery in east Bend, where Juli Labhart experiments with new recipes and monitors each batch. Whether she's mixing dulce de leche and sea salt or Oregon hazelnut, she follows a strict recipe for each batch.

"I love food, and I love numbers," said Labhart, who studied math in college. "I have a really dorky spreadsheet where I calculate the fat and sugar."

Unlike ice cream, gelato is about 6 percent fat and made mostly from milk, explained Labhart. In general, ice cream is made with more cream and churned differently so there's more air, which can mute flavors in comparison to gelato, she explained.

"When you taste something without fat, the flavors are more rich," Labhart said.

The Labharts use all-natural sweeteners, which means Juli Labhart can eat the gelato she makes — even with her food allergies. The couple seeks out local ingredients — such as hazelnuts and strawberries — whenever possible, and often crafts new flavors depending on what's in season.

Eberhard's Dairy Products, which is based in Redmond, supplies all of the company's milk.

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