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Dairy

Why freezing milk is important in the dairy sheep industry – and how to do it

By SIERRA DAWN McCLAIN
Capital Press

One of the biggest challenges in running a sheep dairy is the industry is highly seasonal, with annual cycles of breeding, lambing and lactation. Fresh milk production normally hits its peak after lambing and slows down through the fall and winter.

The industry is fine-tuning management techniques for out-of-season breeding and developing genetic lines that produce more milk in the off season. But it may be years before these innovations help producers overcome seasonal slumps, experts say.

In the meantime, processors that need a stable supply of milk year-round for making yogurt and cheese are turning to another solution: freezing sheep milk for later processing. The process is not as simple as it sounds.

“There’s no doubt fresh milk is easier to use, but there’s just not enough fresh milk year-round in the quantities we need,” said Liam Callahan, co-founder, cheesemaker and CEO of Bellwether Farms in Sonoma, Calif., a major processor.

In a panel discussion during the Dairy Sheep Association of North America’s symposium, farmers and processors with freezing experience shared advice on best practices.

Tom Clark, co-founder of Old Chatham Sheep Company in New York, one of the nation’s largest and oldest processors, said it’s crucial to freeze sheep milk at a low temperature; he recommends minus 20 degrees Fahrenheit, or at minimum, minus 10 degrees Fahrenheit.

“The milk can be compromised if it gets too

warm,” said Clark.

Clark said he has used a device to monitor temperature. He has also used Rennet tests, performed on thawing milk, as recommended by the University of Wisconsin.

Some farmers, he said, use poly bags for storing and freezing milk. Others fill plastic buckets.

Clark said he learned through years of experience that it’s important to use a blend of frozen and fresh milk, rather than only frozen milk, to create products. For cheese, he recommends a minimum of 35% fresh milk, and for yogurt, he suggests a 50-50 blend of fresh and frozen milk.

Terry Felda, owner of Tin Willows Sheep Dairy and Ranch in Eastern Oregon, a 450-acre farm milking about 65 Assaf-cross ewes, said she has learned the importance of sanitizing buckets with a bleach-water solution before filling and freezing them.

Felda said she also tries not to overload any of her four freezers with too much product.

Cheesemaker Brad Gregory, of Black Sheep Creamery in Chehalis, Wash., stores milk in a large, walk-in freezer to have a reliable milk supply year-round.

When making cheese, Gregory said he sees about 5% to 10% less yield using frozen milk versus fresh. He uses both frozen and fresh milk for hard cheeses but avoids using frozen milk to make soft, fresh cheeses for textural reasons.

Woody Babcock, who runs Woodrow Farms with his wife Cora Wahl in Langlois, Ore., said he, like Clark of Old Chatham, has found that minus 20 degrees seems to be the sweet spot for freezing.

Dairy exports see double-digit growth

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

After a lackluster October, U.S. dairy exports rebounded in November, climbing 19% in volume and 32% in value year over year.

Nonfat dry milk/skim milk powder and cheese led the way with growth rates of 25% and 40%, respectively, according to the U.S. Dairy Export Council.

Exports of NDM/SMP totaled 76,422 metric tons, easily a record amount for November. Topping the demand was Southeast Asia, with shipments 37% ahead of November 2020. That increase was driven by significant increases to Vietnam — up 292% year over year — and the Philippines, up 76%.

“Backlogged product finally making it to buy-



Capital Press File

Dairy exports were up in November.

ers likely contributed to regional volumes in November, but the percentage gains to Southeast Asia also benefited from a weak November 2020,” said Paul Rogers, a correspondent with USDEC.

The U.S. also saw significant increases in most other major markets, with pow-

der exports up 37% in South America, 9% in Mexico, 196% in Central America and 27% in China.

Global demand remains strong but the U.S. price advantage over the European Union and New Zealand has narrowed significantly since September, he said.

Chobani scholarships aimed at underserved students

Capital Press

Chobani is expanding its Scholars Program, adding a pledge of \$1 million and a focus on supporting historically underserved students who want to pursue careers related to agriculture, agri-business or food science.

The program has helped dozens of university students pursue their ambitions in the dairy industry. That mission now includes creating a more equitable future in agriculture.

Through its partnerships with University of Idaho and Cornell University, the Chobani Scholars Program will offer eight scholarships of \$20,000 a year over five years to historically underserved students interested in studying agriculture, dairy, food science or food entrepreneurship.

Chobani will also provide \$20,000 of annual funding to each of the universities during the same time to support diversity, equity



Carol Ryan Dumas/Capital Press File

The Chobani Innovation and Community Center in Twin Falls, Idaho. The company is expanding its scholarship program at the University of Idaho and Cornell University.

and inclusion training and education.

Chobani Scholars will have an opportunity to intern with the company during their college careers. In prior years the program was limited to students from a dairy background who were pursuing careers in dairy.

“Today’s announcement builds on our mission to help ensure opportunities for stu-

dents from underserved communities with an interest in working on a farm or in agribusiness, in food science, and those who want to start a food business,” said Peter McGuinness, Chobani president and COO.

“We’re proud to be supporting dozens of current students in our home states of Idaho and New York, and we’re thrilled to be expand-

ing the Chobani Scholars program.”

The Chobani Scholars program was established at the two universities in 2018. The grants have helped more than two dozen students attending the University of Idaho College of Agricultural and Life Sciences and Cornell University’s College of Agriculture and Life Sciences.

With the announcement, Chobani’s scholarship funding pledge will total more than \$1.4 million by 2027.

“The Chobani Scholars Program provides an incredible opportunity to Idaho students who otherwise may not be able to attend college,” said Michael Parrella, dean of the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences at the University of Idaho.

“We are grateful for our strong partnership with Chobani and their passion for creating a pathway for Idahoans from underrepresented communities who wish to pursue a career in agriculture,” he said.

Dairy West announces leadership changes

Capital Press

Chace Fullmer, owner of Fullmer Farms in Sigurd, Utah, is taking the reins as chairman of Dairy West, a regional dairy promotion organization representing dairy farmers, processors and supply-chain partners in Utah and Idaho.

He replaces Steve Ballard of Ballard Farms in Gooding, Idaho, who served as chairman for four years.

Newly appointed board member John Brubaker, owner of Knotts Run Dairy in Buhl, Idaho, was elected vice chairman. Heglar Creek Farms owner Josh Webb of Declo, Idaho, was elected treasurer. Leak Family Farm owner Matt Leak of Comish, Utah, will

serve as secretary.

Other new directors are Pete Wiersma, Idaho Dairy Association president and owner of Fairview Dairy in Buhl, and Debra Reeves, co-owner of White Harvest Farms in Buhl.

Other new leaders, listed below, were announced.

Idaho Dairy Products Commission

- Mike Siegersma, Nampa, chairman.
- Brian Esplin, Shelley, vice chairman.
- Melinda Wolf, Dairy West training and development manager, secretary.
- John Brubaker, Buhl.
- Pete Wiersma, Buhl.
- Steve Ballard, Gooding.

Utah Dairy Council

- Jeff Hardy, Brigham City, chairman.
- David Roberts, Beaver, vice chairman.
- Malarik Harrison, Myton, secretary.

United Dairy Industry Association

- John Brubaker, Buhl, Idaho, secretary.
- Brian Esplin, Shelley, Idaho.
- Jeff Hardy, Brigham City, Utah.
- Tom Kasper, Melba, Idaho.

In addition to the new officers, Don Gaalswyk of Buhl, Idaho, and Kim Korn of Terreton, Idaho, will serve on the National Dairy Promotion and Research Board.



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