



ADF National Dairy Farmers' Summit

Thursday 13 March 2014

Theme 6: Cohesive Dairy Community

Introduction

- The dairy community is not only defined by what it produces, but also the common attributes and attitudes of individual people, families and businesses.
- There are many different starting points in dairy – different regions, farming systems and companies. Belonging to and having pride in being part of a “dairy family” can enrich the experiences of those in the industry and project optimism about an industry working together.
- This theme looks at how best to use and promote the commonalities to provide a supportive and attractive setting for dairy businesses.

Where we have been

The dairy industry is spread across a vast continent – farmers are producing milk in tropical, sub-tropical, temperate and cold climates – utilising grass, grain and supplements to varying degrees and servicing different markets. Despite these differences, the dairy industry has a tradition of cooperation, which has allowed it to successfully address many challenges. The ability of the dairy industry to work across the supply chain was unique in agriculture and allowed the sector to represent itself with “one voice”. In government circles, the dairy industry was recognised as an industry that “had its act together” – this facilitated positive engagement, active consideration and favourable outcomes.

% change in dairy farm numbers since 1999/2000



Dairy farmers across the industry have always been willing to share with their colleagues, welcome them up the drive and into their homes. Discussion groups, membership of industry organisations, the existence of cooperatives, and participation in industry events have built the dairy industry’s sense of community over many years.

However, as businesses have become larger and more complex, many farmers have found it increasingly difficult to attend and support events. Cooperatives are less a feature of the industry – supply is more about contracts than membership, and loyalty on both sides of the relationship has been eroded.

At the same time - as farm numbers have dropped, dairy producers have been spread more sparsely across regions. In areas that have seen the greatest rationalisation, the loss of dairy-specific services has no doubt compounded the isolation of the farmers that remain.

Regional differences have become more pronounced. For example, as northern regions – and to some extent Western Australia - have become increasingly focussed on the fresh milk market, their production systems, market drivers and concerns have diverged from their colleagues in southern regions. Industry organisations funded by fewer stakeholders and under increasing resource pressure have needed to straddle these issues.

Recently the differences across the industry have been higher profile than the commonalities. While the industry has plenty of common ground issues that it can address at a national level, it has become more difficult to “speak with one voice” unless it is at the lowest common denominator. This has tended to highlight negative aspects of the industry to those outside it, and alienated dairy industry stakeholders with a different view.

Farmers across the industry have recognised the need to improve the industry image – to attract labour, investment and bolster confidence. The Legendairy™ program is a major industry initiative that aims to improve dairy’s image and identity. However, it will only be effective with the industry’s people behind it and promoting it. The challenge is to bring together a dairy community that is increasingly diverse and dispersed.

Where we are going

In a society that is more urban, diverse and disconnected it is becoming more difficult to “belong” but no less important.

As the trend toward fewer larger farms continues, Australia’s dairy community is likely to be sparser – particularly in some regions. Loss of critical mass and services are likely to drive further loss of identity and connection.

A recognised ‘community’ provides opportunities for the exchange of ideas and support for people going through change. Even further, it can instil confidence in an optimistic future.

The rise of new forms of media and communication will continue, bringing new opportunities for engagement, but also challenges in the way the industry is represented and how it is perceived.

Into the future, the dairy industry will need to tell its story in a clear way–

- To everyone who wants to work in an industry that stands for something - that is inclusive and rewarding;
- To customers for the products we will produce;
- To people that want to invest;
- To people who want to know about how we treat our animals and use natural resources;
- To engage government and other stakeholders in a positive way.

A dairy community that represents and reinforces the industry’s values, vision and priorities will support the development and longevity for the industry.

Questions for the workshop

1. What does success look like for a cohesive dairy community?
2. What are the most important common issues for our dairy community?
3. How can we strengthen the value of a cohesive dairy community for individual farmers?
4. How can we tell our story more effectively and influence those we want to work with?
5. What are the top 3 things the industry can do to bring together the dairy community?