

ISU Dairy Farm Open House 2022 – An Opportunity for Education and Engagement

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Summary and Implications

The month of June is known as ‘June Dairy Month’ and therefore, the Iowa State University (ISU) Dairy Farm Open House took place on June 10th, 2022. The purpose of the ISU Dairy Farm Open House was to invite the public, free of charge, to come and visit the ISU Dairy Research and Teaching Unit in order to learn more about the dairy industry’s commitment to animal care, to observe how a modern-day dairy operation functions on a daily basis, and to celebrate and learn about all things dairy. Hence, throughout the event, visitors were able to: consume a variety of safe, wholesome, and nutritious dairy products; learn about cow comfort and the various management practices that are in place on dairy farms to assure that all dairy animals are cared for with the utmost care, view a live milking parlor demonstration and learn about the proper steps dairy farms follow in order to harvest milk properly and safely from dairy cows, and participants received a driving tour of the dairy farm. Tours of the ISU Dairy Farm were provided by research faculty and graduate students who have a deep understanding of dairy production and management and therefore, they were able to further enlighten guests on common feeding strategies used for the dairy herd, discuss the dairy industry’s commitment to sustainable farming practices, and environmental stewardship. At the end of the driving tour, guests were transported to the ‘Ag Discovery Center’ to learn more about agriculture throughout Iowa from a variety of commodity groups within the state. An optional, post-event survey (Table 1) was distributed to gauge visitor perception of the dairy industry. Of those who completed the survey (81 respondents), 94% of visitors indicated having a positive or very positive perception of the dairy industry. Also, 98% of respondents indicated they would attend this event in the future, and respondents unanimously indicated they would recommend this event to someone else. Thus, moving forward, there is a continued desire by the public for ISU to continue planning and hosting the ISU Dairy Farm Open House. Due in part because this event is an excellent

opportunity for all in involved to continue educating and promoting dairy to the public in order to ensure a thriving dairy industry in the years to come.

Introduction

Now, more than ever, a large majority of the US population is removed from agriculture and therefore, are unfamiliar with modern-day farming practices that are utilized to provide the world population with nutritious and wholesome food. Not surprising, today’s average consumer is more concerned and skeptical about how their food is raised and produced. Subsequently, planning and hosting a dairy farm open house is the dairy industry’s first step toward earning the public’s trust by educating them on how dairy farmers are committed to the highest standards of animal care and comfort, food safety, and environmental stewardship.

ISU Dairy Team Response

After a two-year hiatus (retirement of former event planner Dr. Leo Timms and the COVID-19 pandemic), the three-event tri-chairs (Ms. Christen Burgett, Dr. Gail Carpenter, and Ms. Katie England) put together a collective effort in order to plan and host the 2022 ISU Dairy Farm Open House. Furthermore, ISU collaborated with the regional dairy check-off organization, Midwest Dairy and additional partners and donors included: Casey’s, Hy-Vee, Hiland Dairy, Prairie Farms, and the Iowa State Dairy Association. This Ames community favorite event hosted approximately 600 visitors, despite a rainy start to the morning.

To kick off the morning festivities, Lieutenant Governor Gregg was in attendance and he was excited to read the proclamation signed by Governor Reynolds declaring June Dairy Month in Iowa! Secretary of Agriculture of Iowa, Mike Naig, also made an appearance and was able to discuss policy and agriculture while learning more about the ISU Dairy Farm.

Upon arrival, throughout the event, guests were able to indulge in breakfast at the Dairy Café (Casey’s breakfast pizza, donuts, bananas, yogurt, milk and orange juice), receive informational tours of the milking parlor and milk

house, hop on a trolley and receive a driving tour of the farm (24 total trolley rides were given), and lastly, visitors learned about various agricultural commodity groups within Iowa while listening to, 'Dairy Larry and Da Udders' at the 'Ag Discovery Center'! At the 'Ag Discovery Center', numerous commodity groups and organizations were represented and aided in sharing agriculture's story. Visitors had the pleasure learning more about dairy and agricultural production from: Midwest Dairy, Iowa Beef Industry Council, Iowa Corn Growers Association, Iowa Pork Producers Association, and the Iowa Turkey Federation. The nutrition group within the Department of Animal Science had an educational booth as well in which they educated participants about the ruminant stomach along with common feed ingredients fed to dairy cattle. New to the scene this year, educating visitors about dairy products, was the ISU Creamery. The ISU Creamery handed out samples of 'Study Breaks' which are the Creamery's very own rendition of cheddar cheese bites. At the end of the event, an optional nine-question post-event survey was available for event attendees to complete either via traditional paper and pencil or electronically via a scannable QR code.

Overall, approximately 40 volunteers came together in order to help host this wonderful event related to all things dairy. Therefore, it was a great day filled with laughter and fun activities for all ages and it was an excellent opportunity to connect and engage with the public and local consumers while promoting and celebrating the dairy industry!

Results and Discussion

81 people completed the optional, nine-question post-event survey. Assuming there were 600 attendees, approximately 14% of attendees completed the survey. The overwhelming majority of respondents (84%) were from Iowa, although 10 other states were represented, and one respondent indicated that they were from England. More than half (54%) of respondents indicated that they heard about the event through social media. It should be noted that this response is likely skewed; for example, only one respondent indicated hearing about the event through daycare/pre-school, likely because only one childcare provider completed the survey despite the high observed turnout of school-aged children. However, it seems apparent that social media was an effective strategy for those who did not attend with a daycare program or senior care center.

More than half (54%) of respondents indicated that they had visited a dairy before. Of those, 19 people (40% of those who had previously visited a dairy) had attended the ISU Dairy Farm Open House in previous years. The majority of these (81%) had attended the Open House more than once, with 3 respondents indicating that they had attended 5 or more times. 36 respondents indicated that they were knowledgeable or very knowledgeable about the dairy industry, with only 7 respondents indicating that they had no knowledge.

After attending the event, 58% of respondents indicated that they had a very positive perception of the dairy industry, while 36% had a positive perception and 6% were neutral. No respondents reported having a negative or very negative perception. When rating their experiences at the ISU Dairy Farm Open House, none of the event stops (dairy café, milking parlor, milk house, driving tour of farm, ag learning center) received poor or below average ratings, and each of the event stops had a majority excellent rating (62-89% of responses). The highest rated event stop was the driving tour of the farm, with 71 excellent ratings (89% of responses) and an average score of 4.85 on a 1-5 scale. The lowest rated stops were the milking parlor and the milk house, with average scores of 4.58 and 4.57, respectively.

Overall, the overwhelming majority of respondents (98%) indicated that they would attend this event in the future, and respondents unanimously indicated that they would recommend the event to someone else.

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Table 1. Post-event survey could be completed either via a QR code or paper and pencil.

Questions							
1. How did you hear about this event? Circle all that apply.	Social Media	Department of Animal Science Website	Radio Program	Through a daycare/pre-school program	Through a senior care/assisted living center	Word of Mouth	Other
2. What city and state are you from?							
3. Have you ever visited a dairy farm before?	Yes	No					
3a. If yes to question 3, Have you previously attended an ISU Dairy Farm Open House?	Yes	No					
3b. If yes to 3a, How many times have you attended a previous ISU Dairy Farm Open House?	0 times	1 time	2 times	3 times	4 times	5 or more times	
4. Prior to attending this event, what was your knowledge of the dairy industry?	No knowledge	Slightly knowledgeable		Knowledgeable		Very knowledgeable	
5. After participating in this event, what is your perception of the dairy industry?	Very Positive	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Very Negative		
6. Rate/circle your experience at each of these event stops from poor (1) to excellent (5).							
6a. Dairy Café – consuming dairy products	1-Poor	2-Below Average		3-Average	4-Good	5-Excellent	
6b. Learning about the milking parlor and how cows are milked	1-Poor	2-Below Average		3-Average	4-Good	5-Excellent	
6c. Learning about the milk house and how milked is stored at a safe temperature	1-Poor	2-Below Average		3-Average	4-Good	5-Excellent	
6d. Driving tour of farm	1-Poor	2-Below Average		3-Average	4-Good	5-Excellent	
6e. Agricultural Learning Center/Kids Zone (in the hoop barn)	1-Poor	2-Below Average		3-Average	4-Good	5-Excellent	
7. Would you attend this event in the future?	Yes	No					
8. Would you recommend this event to someone else?	Yes	No					
9. What additional feedback do you have for the event organizers? Feel free to use the backside of this paper to leave additional comments.							

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