

June Dairy Month Open Houses: Improving Consumer Understanding of Modern Animal Agriculture

A.S. Leaflet R3088

Leo Timms, Ryan Breuer, and Jenn Bentley, ISU Extension and Outreach Dairy Specialists; Megan Kregel, Dairy Center Coordinator, Northeast Iowa Dairy Foundation

Summary and Implications

Three dairy open houses as part of June Dairy Month events were conducted to provide the public the opportunity to experience and learn first-hand about the efforts made daily on modern dairies to achieve cow care, cow comfort and health, hygienic milking procedures, local cropping systems that provide quality feed for the dairy herd, manure management and land stewardship, respect for family and non-family workers, and overall quality and safety of milk and dairy products. These events were a product of industry partnerships. The three events reached 5000+ participants. Surveys performed at all 3 events showed many participants had trust in dairy farmers and the dairy industry prior to the event, but post tour surveys showed enhancement in their knowledge of modern dairy practices that assure animal health and comfort, product quality and safety, and environmental stewardship and preservation (with 100% of participants improving their views and trust in modern dairy farming). A survey at one site regarding dairy product use (536 respondents) showed 65% eating the recommended 3 dairy servings/ day with 93% ≥ 2 servings, and the three major factors influencing dairy purchase decisions being taste (2X greater than any other answer), nutritional content, and price (both equally weighted)

Introduction

A large percentage of US population lives in an urban or suburban environment, and are slightly disconnected from agriculture and food production. At the same time, there is increasing interest and concern in the general population about food safety, quality, and sustainability.

ISU Dairy Team/ NEIDF/ WIDA Program Response

ISU Extension Dairy Team partnered with Iowa's dairy producer and industry associations, other farm and commodity organizations (ISU site) and the regional dairy check-off organization, Midwest Dairy Association, to plan and host Dairy Farm Open House events as part of "June Dairy Month" activities. Partners included: Northeast Iowa Dairy Foundation (host), Western Iowa Dairy Alliance (host), Iowa State Dairy Association; Midwest Dairy Association, Iowa Dairy Processors (Hiland Dairy, Swiss Valley Farms, AMPI, and Wells Blue Bunny), and the Iowa Egg, Pork, Beef, Soybean, and Corn commodity groups.

The purpose of the summer 2015 Open Houses (one in NE Iowa at the Calmar Dairy Center, one in central Iowa at the ISU Dairy Farm, and one in NW Iowa at a large family-owned dairy farm) was to provide experiential events whereby the general public could see and learn first-hand about the efforts made daily on modern dairies to achieve cow care, cow comfort and health, hygienic milking procedures, local cropping systems that provide quality feed for the dairy herd, manure management and land stewardship, and respect for family and non-family workers.

At all open house sites, the planning partners incorporated a tour of the dairy with designated stations to showcase and educate on specific attributes of dairy farms (animal comfort and health, milking practices, product safety and quality, environmental stewardship). Members of the dairy community—dairy producers and agri-professionals—served as tour guides and narrators. In this way, guests learned facts about dairy herd management and production directly from the people who work on or serve the farm. The events also incorporated opportunities to showcase and taste existing and new dairy products. Finally, all events incorporated a survey to assess participant knowledge and interests in the dairy industry and dairy practices, and one site also surveyed dairy product use and buying decision choices.

The ISU Dairy Open House also had an agricultural learning center that encompassed interactive learning displays from all the commodity groups as well as an interactive agricultural display and maze on environmental stewardship.

The NE Iowa Dairy Foundation hosted an annual Breakfast on the Farm, with a purpose of educating consumers about the wholesomeness of dairy while eating a great breakfast. The family-oriented event includes a tour of the 300-cow dairy farm at the Dairy Center, a farm animal petting zoo, and interactive activities with NICC Dairy Science Club members. A post survey was also conducted.

Result and Discussion

A total of 5000+ participants were involved in these 3 events with many families and young children, and most participants from non-agricultural backgrounds. Guests at all sites were invited to complete surveys to rate their experience of the dairy tour, knowledge and trust of dairy practices, and dairy product usage and purchase decisions (1 site). The survey results were very favorable and indicated success in achieving the goal to improve consumers' knowledge and understanding about modern dairy farms.

Iowa State University Animal Industry Report 2016

Survey Results and Impacts

- A total of 5000+ participants were involved in these 3 events with many families and young children, and most participants from non-agricultural backgrounds and 700+ post event surveys were completed.
 - 99% rated successful / educational (88% rating excellent; 11% rating very good).
 - Prior to the event, 76% had a positive (65% extremely positive) opinion and trust in dairy.
 - Post workshop (PW), 99% believed dairies provided the best care and handling of animals.
 - PW, 99% believed dairies are protective of the environment and excel at environmental stewardship.
 - PW, 99% stated dairies provided extremely safe and wholesome milk and dairy products.
 - 100% supported growth of dairy industry in Iowa.
- PW, 99+% stated dairies and dairy practices were impressive and had extreme confidence and trust in dairy farms and the dairy industry.
 - Participant's opinion of modern dairies following event was positively and significantly increased.
 - 65% of surveyed attendee ate recommended 3 dairy servings / day (93% \geq 2 servings)
 - Dairy purchase decisions influenced by taste and flavor (#1), followed by nutrition and price.

Overall Findings:

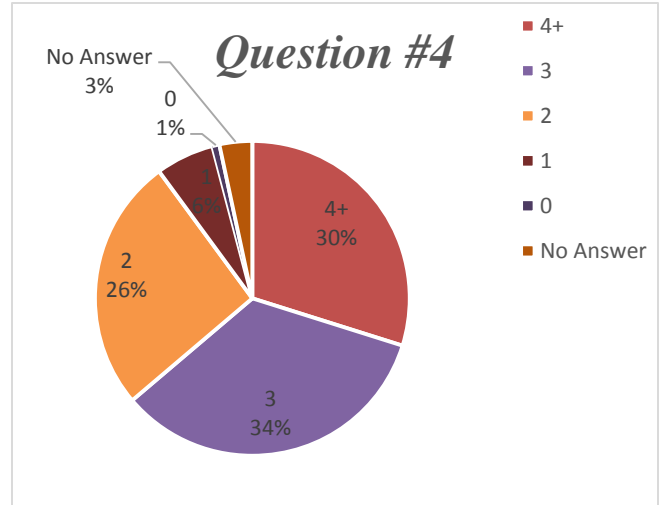
- Attendees found the events to be worthwhile and would classify them as an A.
- Many participants had high trust in dairy producers and farms prior to event.
- Participant's opinion of modern dairy farms following the event was positively and significantly increased.

2.) Prior to your visit today, did you think dairy farmers take good care of their animals? (536 respondents)

3.) From what you've seen today, do you believe dairy farmers are good caretakers of their cows and calves?



4.) Dairy products include: Milk, Cheese, Yogurt, Ice Cream, Butter and Sour Cream, how many servings of dairy products do you consume on an average day?



5.) Choose the **TWO** factors that most influence your choice of dairy products. (n = 1111 response (2/ person)).

