News Release

United Dairymen of Idaho

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Idaho's Dairy Industry: Perception Versus Reality

Idaho's dairy industry has grown tremendously over the last ten years. One only has to look at milk production to understand the growth of this industry. In 1970, Idaho's dairy industry produced 1.4 billion pounds of milk. In 2003, Idaho's dairy farm families produced more than 8 billion pounds of milk.

Although Idaho's dairy industry touches thousands of lives through production, processing, and allied industries, people's perceptions often lead to erroneous beliefs regarding Idaho's dairy industry.

For a better understanding of Idaho's dairy industry, United Dairymen of Idaho has taken some common perceptions and provided real facts that dispel fallacies attributed to the dairy industry.

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Perception

Dairy farms are responsible for contaminating ground water and reducing the amount of available drinking water for nearby communities.

Reality

A safe and abundant water supply is a primary concern for any dairy farm. Not only do farm families rely on the fresh water, but their animals need clean drinking water as well. Dairy farmers manage their water resources very carefully. Wasted water is expensive for the farmer and increases the demand on his/her nutrient management systems.

An average 1,250-cow dairy uses 41 million gallons of water per year with land use that is equivalent to that of a 60-acre alfalfa crop (this assumes the dairy is using a flush system – many dairies today use different methods and water use is considerably less). In contrast, the 60-acre alfalfa crop uses more than 87 million gallons of water.

On an average 200 acre farm there is a 14.6% reduction in water use when 45 acres are used as a dairy for 1,250 cows versus regular crop farming. If the dairy does not use a flush system, an even more significant reduction in water use occurs. Dairies recycle and reuse all the water used on the farm. For example, water used for milk cooling is often reused to clean the milking center. Lagoon waste water is recycled to supplement irrigation water and help crops grow. In addition, all dairy farms have nutrient management plans as required by law and enforced through the Idaho State Department of Agriculture.

To help ensure that surface and ground water remains pure, Idaho dairymen have invested more than $10 million in recent years to comply with the Clean Water Act. Plus, they participate in an Idaho Dairy Inspection program that has increased annual dairy inspections from 30-50 per year to 2,800 per year. According to a federal EPA report, Idaho has one of the most progressive environmental protection programs in the country.

Source: Idaho State Department of Agriculture; Darwin Vander Stelt, Nutrient Management; Ford Foundation Innovations in American Government

Perception

The odor from a dairy farm is a public nuisance and a threat to public health.

Reality

There is no denying that organic waste - human, animal, or vegetation - creates odor. Whether the odor constitutes a nuisance varies in every instance. However, the dairy industry in Idaho recognizes the possible adverse affects of odor created by some operations in their industry. The Idaho dairy industry has taken proactive measures to reduce the detrimental impacts of odor created through dairy farming.

The dairy industry, in cooperation with state agencies and the Governor's Initiative, is developing new technology and systems to control odor. Idaho's dairy industry, government, and academia are actively pursuing economically viable methods to reduce adverse odor emissions. Several Idaho dairies are already employing some of these technologies on their farms.

Dairy farmers understand the need to be good neighbors and to control odor. The vast majority of Idaho's dairy farmers live on the land they farm. They continue to look for solutions for the welfare of the community, their employees, and their animals.

Source: Idaho Department of Agriculture

Perception

Large, corporate farms are destroying the family farm and running independent farmers out of business.

Reality

All but one of the 760 dairy farms in Idaho are owned by an individual or a married couple who are responsible for operating the farm. In some instances, a parent and one or more children or other relative own and operate the farms. Many dairy farms are multigenerational businesses that are family owned and operated. While some of these farms may legally be

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considered corporations for business purposes, they are family owned and controlled. Each takes pride in contributing to the well being of their community.

Source: United Dairymen of Idaho; Idaho State Department of Agriculture

Perception

New dairy farms are being built with no consideration for the environment or area residents.

Reality

The facilities, equipment, and land improvements required to build a new dairy farm cost hundreds of thousands of dollars, and sites for new farms are very carefully evaluated for a number of characteristics. For a farmer to do otherwise would be both irresponsible and financially unwise. A farmer's land is his/her home and it takes a clean home to run a safe business. Further, dairy farmers' livelihoods come from the land and the protection of the environment is of vital importance to them.

Site approval involves numerous steps, including studying topographical maps, soil survey maps, flood maps, and aerial photos. Farmers must comply with county planning and zoning requirements for siting of any new or modified dairy farm. Dairymen must also meet all construction nutrient management water rights as required under various state agencies such as the Idaho State Department of Water Resources, the Idaho State Department of Agriculture and the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality.

Source: Idaho State Department of Agriculture

Perception

Dairy cattle manure is distributed indiscriminately over area fields.

Reality

Manure management is an important consideration on a modern dairy farm, second only to animal health and well-being. That's why the dairy industry has spent years and countless research dollars developing new technologies to improve manure management skills. Every

Idaho dairy farmer has developed a nutrient management plan to ensure environmentally sound methods of land-applying nutrients produced on a dairy farm. The manure is land applied at times and in quantities that reduce adverse environmental impacts and provide healthy soil conditions and valuable nutrients for crops. On file at the Idaho Department of Agriculture, plan requirements include facility summary, site plan, land application site plan, manure handling and storage, nutrient management system, and irrigation management.

Idaho dairy industry research has also uncovered successful methods for Idaho dairy farmers to recycle animal manure as an effective organic fertilizer. Through a well-designed manure management system, manure continues to digest, reducing the level of nutrients like nitrogen and transforming those nutrients into forms that can be used by plants. This organic, recycled fertilizer can then be used to replace synthetic fertilizer to grow such forages as hay, corn or other crops.

Source: Idaho State Department of Agriculture

Perception

Confined animals are prone to more disease, so farmers are forced to routinely use antibiotics, hormones, and drugs to keep them alive.

Reality

Dairy cows must be healthy and well cared for in order to produce pure, wholesome milk. Just as humans care for their children by taking them to a doctor when they are ill, dairy farmers take care of their herds by providing a nutritious diet, good medical care, and healthy living conditions. In fact, recent improvements in farm sanitation practices have greatly reduced the need for preventive animal health products.

All shipments of milk offered for sale for human consumption are tested for antibiotics. Any milk found to contain antibiotics is destroyed as required by state and federal laws.

Dairy farmers recognize that proper animal care practices help lead to the production of high quality milk. If an animal should become sick, dairy farmers work closely with

veterinarians and other animal health professionals to address cow health issues. Dairy farmers use herd preventative plans, which include vaccination and sanitation programs designed to reduce the use of antibiotics and drugs. The animal is treated as quickly as possible with products prescribed by a veterinarian to cure the disease and reduce pain and suffering.

Source: National Milk Producers Federation; Dairy Management Inc.; Idaho State Department of Agriculture

Perception

Dairy products are unsafe.

Reality

Dairy products are among the safest, most tested, and most regulated food products in the world. These products undergo several safety, quality, and sanitation procedures, such as pasteurization. Milk and dairy foods are subject to up to 17 safety, quality, and sanitation inspections before ever reaching the grocery store.

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture; National Milk Producers Federation

Perception

The average dairy cow is fed whatever the farmer happens to have available, without regard to what the animal needs for good health.

Reality

Both dairy farmers and the feed manufacturers work with animal health nutritionists to see that each cow receives almost precisely the correct amount of such vital nutrients as minerals, vitamins and amino acids.

Dairy farmers represent the most fundamental practitioners of animal welfare. Dairy farmers recognize that proper animal care practices and a nutritious diet help lead to the production of high quality milk.

Source: National Milk *Producers* Federation; Dairy Management Inc.

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Perception

All dairy farmers are wealthy.

Reality

Today's dairy farmers receive about the same price for their product as they did in 1980, while receiving a significantly smaller share of what consumers spend on dairy products. Dairy farmers must continually find ways to become more efficient, and to be aware of the demands of both the domestic and international marketplace.

Source: National Milk Producers Federation

Perception

The Idaho dairy industry contributes very little to the state's economy.

Reality

University of Idaho economic analysis indicates that agriculture is Idaho's leading natural resource-based industry, accounting for 21 percent of Idaho's gross state product. Food processing ranks second at 14.9 percent. Production agriculture and food processing combined account for more than a third (35.9 percent) of Idaho's gross state product.

Agribusiness - the farm and food processors - accounts for one in every seven jobs in Idaho. The new dollars, or exports, produced by Idaho's agribusiness industry ripple throughout Idaho's economy to create over 1000, jobs, and over $4 billion in value added.

In Idaho's agribusiness industry, one in every four dollars received by Idaho farmers is a milk check. In 2003, milk receipts exceeded one billion dollars, double potato receipts. Over a quarter of the agricultural cash receipts received by farmers in Idaho are from dairy.

Source: University of Idaho CES, BUL 836

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United Dairymen of Idaho (UDI) is the local planning and management organization responsible for increasing demand for U.S. produced dairy products on behalf of Idaho's dairy farm families.