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Advancing dairy research to build credibility and trust

Credibility helps build trust. We see this in our everyday lives. As a farmer, you work with specific vendors because they have proven themselves to be dependable, reliable and experts in their field. Likewise, you choose your family physician, dentist or bank for similar reasons – they have established their credibility, so you trust them.

One of Midwest Dairy’s strategic objectives is to advance dairy research. To accomplish this, we are working to be seen by partners as a subject matter expert and a source of credible science, research and insights, all with the end goal of building trust in dairy.

In this issue of Promotion in Action, you’ll get a glimpse of our work on the advance dairy research objective to build credibility with partners. Among these examples:

- The launch of a new [Research & Trends](#) page on [MidwestDairy.com](#) that highlights national trends impacting the dairy industry, houses consumer insights webinars and videos, and allows partners to sign up for monthly insights updates.
- A series of “edutaining” videos that tell dairy’s sustainability story in response to insights that consumers have strong interest in better understanding where their food comes from.
- An update on the Pizza Ranch breakfast pizza promotion, which resulted in part from consumer insights Midwest Dairy’s team gathered on breakfast pizzas in retail.

By gaining the trust of partners and being positioned as subject matter experts, Midwest Dairy continues to work on your behalf to build trust in dairy.

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Bringing the farm to the classroom through technology in the Adopt a Cow program

How tall will she be? Does she exercise? Where does she live? These are just a few of the questions 4th and 5th-grade students asked their teacher when she introduced them to Pearl, a dairy calf from a local dairy farm. How students learned the answers to those questions along with more details about life on a dairy farm, without ever leaving the classroom, was the topic of conversation in [the latest episode of Dairy on the Air](#).

In this episode, Brita Gibart, a teacher from Farmington, Minnesota, and Lorilee Schultz, a dairy farmer from Orangeville, Illinois, joined host Andy Vance in a discussion exploring the impact of the Adopt a Cow program on students, teachers and dairy farmers. The discussion touched on how the Adopt a Cow program, a partnership between Discover Dairy and Midwest Dairy, brings real-life details about dairy farming directly into the classrooms of students across the Midwest Dairy region and provides an opportunity for dairy farmers to share about how they care for their animals, the environment and their communities.

Adopt A Cow is just one example of how students and farmers are having meaningful connections using technology, and because it's easily accessible, these conversations can have an exponentially larger reach than a traditional on farm visit. Through Midwest Dairy's partnership with Adopt a Cow this school year, more than 10,000 educators have signed up, and more than 260,000 students have participated in the program. This is a 1,400 percent increase from the previous school year.

Tune in to the latest episode of [Dairy on the Air](#) to learn more about the Adopt a Cow program from the perspective of both an educator and dairy farmer. This Dairy on the Air episode, and others, can be download on iTunes, Google Play, Stitcher, iHeartRadio or your favorite podcast platform. You can also listen to this, and all Dairy on the Air episodes, directly on [MidwestDairy.com](#).

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Midwest Dairy actively reaches out to ag media in 2020

In an effort to consistently share updates with dairy farmers about stories of how their checkoff investment is driving trust and sales in dairy, Midwest Dairy consistently reached out to ag media reporters in 2020,

securing 20 percent more media coverage compared to the previous year. Input from our recent survey of dairy farmers supported that dairy and agriculture publications are a top source of information they rely on for updates related to the dairy industry.

With a total of 494 placements, and a potential audience of nearly 7.8 million, Midwest Dairy shared relevant stories about how checkoff consistently refined its approach due to COVID-19 related trends, relevant consumer insights and other timely news hooks. The team also focused on narrowing in on working with specific media outlets and continued to customize story angles to deepen relationships with key ag media outlets. As a result, coverage in four top-tier national outlets – Hoard’s Dairyman, DairyBusiness, Progressive Dairy and RFD-TV – accounted for nearly 10 percent of our overall earned media placements.

The stories that most resonated with media in 2020 were those that showcased dairy farmer values and Midwest Dairy’s commitment to building and supporting local communities. In 2021, we will continue to build on this success and identify creative ways to tell Midwest Dairy’s checkoff value story.

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Study indicates cheese may protect against age-related cognitive problems

A recent study suggests that eating cheese and responsible consumption of red wine are not just good for helping to cope with stressors, such as the current COVID-19 pandemic, but also in dealing with age-related cognitive functions.

The study, supported by Iowa State University, National Institutes of Health (NIH), and Alzheimer’s Association Research Grant, found a direct correlation between foods that we eat and cognitive activity in our later years. Participants of the study were asked to answer questions about the intake of common foods and alcohol consumption.

While there is no specific food to fight against COVID-19, regular dairy consumption is supported by nutrition science, and emerging research continues to support dairy’s role in immune health, and overall metabolic health which may lead to better outcomes against the current pandemic. This is a great news for dairy, especially cheese, and the fermented foods community.

To learn more about the research, please visit [here](#).

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New research and trends page on MidwestDairy.com

Midwest Dairy has launched a refreshed [Dairy Research and Trends page](#) on MidwestDairy.com. The page hosts a variety of market research and consumer insights now available to industry retailers, processors, and stakeholders. A few of the new resources available include:

- A [video](#) that highlights how checkoff’s investment in research and insights increases dairy demand working with and through our partners.
- A summary of national trends impacting the dairy industry.
- A unique landing page promoting Midwest Dairy’s [2021 "Dairy Today and Tomorrow"](#) consumer insights webinar series.

This page will allow Midwest Dairy to expand the reach of our market research and consumer insights learnings to the dairy community at large. We'll be regularly updating the page with new content, videos and resources to ensure we are delivering timely and relevant resources.

For more in-depth learnings, page viewers will be given the opportunity to subscribe to our Monthly Insights Updates through a pop-up registration. In the coming weeks, we'll support the launch of this new landing page through paid and organic social outreach to dairy retailers, processors, and farmer stakeholders on [Facebook](#) and [LinkedIn](#).

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Midwest Dairy partners with Pizza Ranch to launch new take-and-bake breakfast pizzas

Midwest Dairy partnered with Pizza Ranch in December to launch a new take-and-bake breakfast pizza with a buy 1, get 1 free promotional offer.

The concept began when Scott Gilray, Midwest Dairy director for demand, asked Megan Sheets, manager of consumer insights to research data and insights, which revealed the size and growth of the breakfast pizza segment at retail. The insights were shared with Pizza Ranch, which utilized this information to help persuade their franchisees to support this new product and move up a launch date.

Midwest Dairy then worked with Pizza Ranch to build a December marketing event and a store sales competition to encourage stores to sell the new pizzas. The marketing program included:

- Digital advertising, including websites and social channels = 16 million impressions with overwhelmingly positive comments about the breakfast pizzas
- Email marketing - over 3 million emails sent
- Box-toppers on all orders
- In-door banner displayed at all Pizza Ranch stores highlighting the breakfast pizzas
- All activations included the Undeniable Dairy logo

Midwest Dairy also connected with Iowa Pork Producers Association and the Iowa Egg Council to join us in the support of this new product. The Iowa Egg Council was able to include their logo on the majority of December activations and both organizations will continue to promote the breakfast pizzas in 2021.

The launch and promotional event exceeded all Pizza Ranch and Midwest Dairy expectations. Pizza Ranch sold well over 100K breakfast pizzas in December, which equated to over 8 times the expected volume for the month. Overall December sales of incremental pounds of milk exceeded 350K pounds.

Look for more updates as we move through 2021, and don't forget to order your Pizza Ranch breakfast pizza today!

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Register now for lunchtime Open Mic discussion on Midwest Dairy's efforts to build trust

Midwest Dairy invites dairy farmers to join in our first Open Mic discussion in 2021 where we will provide updates on checkoff's work focused on "Building Trust for Dairy." In our recent farmer survey, farmers said this topic was important, so we'd like to provide more detail and showcase a particular program where

checkoff staff and dairy farmers collaborated to build trust in dairy with thought leaders who will help us reach consumers.

The 30-minute Open Mic session will be on Wednesday, March 3 from 12:30-1 p.m. We will reserve a good portion of the call to answer questions about how we work with and through others to build trust in dairy.

Please register in advance [here](#) for this meeting. We look forward to your participation.

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Save the date: Dairy Experience Forum to be held July 13

The fourth annual Dairy Experience Forum will be held virtually on July 13, 2021 from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Central Time.

The Dairy Experience Forum connects participants to top industry speakers as they share actionable consumer insights, forecasting, and industry thought leadership.

Attendees will have the opportunity to engage with stakeholders from across the dairy industry including dairy farmers, processors, and retailers in small group discussions.

The agenda along with more information on how to register will be made available in April.

In an effort to continue to grow the conference, the 2021 Dairy Experience Forum is being hosted by New England Dairy with support from state and regional dairy checkoff organizations including Midwest Dairy.

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University of Minnesota researchers develop rapid method to predict functionality of process cheese

Process cheese is made by mixing natural cheese such as cheddar, Gouda or Swiss cheese with water, emulsifying salts and other dairy and non-dairy ingredients. One of the biggest challenges in making process cheese is that the final structure is hard to predict and challenging to fix once the cheese mixture is cooled. The main factors leading to structural variabilities in process cheese include:

1. Ingredients - age and choice of natural cheese
2. Mixing and heating parameters
3. Cooling parameters

Current industrial methods to test the structural parameters of the process cheese involve extensive sample preparation at multiple stages of processing and making adjustments to the procedure by modifying the mixing and cooling times to achieve the desired specifications. Rapid in-line testing has been one of the current technology needs in the industry. Now, with the advancement in spectroscopic techniques, the challenges related to sample testing can be lessened by conducting a rapid test and avoiding an extensive sample preparation.

Research conducted at the University of Minnesota, led by Tonya Schoenfuss, Ph.D., and student researcher Lisa Chou, developed a spectroscopic method using Fourier Transform - Near Infrared (FT-NIR) Spectroscopy to develop calibrations that can be used to understand the key functional correlation between fresh and 2-to-4-week-old process cheese. In addition to the benefit of rapid in-line testing the use

of the spectroscopic method affords, the testing is also non-destructive, meaning there is no wastage of test samples.

The key findings of the research and future opportunities were presented to Midwest Dairy Foods Research Center (MDFRC) members during the MDFRC research update webinar on January 27.

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New videos tell the dairy community's sustainability story

Today's consumer wants to know the food they eat not only tastes great, but is made with care for the land and animals, too. Midwest Dairy has recently developed five videos to tell dairy's story in a fun and "edutaining" way. The [main video](#) tells the entire sustainability story in 90 seconds, focusing on how dairy is good for your body, community and planet. The others are about 60 seconds each and dive deeper into topics around how dairy farmers [care for their animals](#), are [local and contribute to their communities](#), are working to [reduce their carbon footprint](#) and [providing nutrition to keep families happy and healthy](#). All of these videos can be found on Midwest Dairy's website as a resource for partners to share and learn more dairy sustainability.

We encourage everyone to share these videos on their digital channels, including Facebook and Instagram. The videos are also available to other community partners to use in schools, libraries or children's museums. Please reach out to your farmer relations manager if you need the videos in a different format or have another idea for their use.

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Social influencer campaign targets retailers, encourages sales

Midwest Dairy recently completed a pilot of a 3-month social influencer campaign to drive consumers to retailers.

Tapping into MilkPEP's relaunch of their iconic #GotMilk campaign and the trend of cooking more at home, Midwest Dairy created a unique #GotMilkRecipe campaign that engaged 30 social influencers throughout our region to post recipes that included milk on Instagram, Pinterest, Facebook and personal blogs. The campaign launched in October and continued through early January.

Each influencer was given a list of key retailers, headquartered in our region, to tag and include "swipe up" shopping carts linked to the retailer. Retailers included Hy-Vee, Jewel-Osco, Target, Schnucks, Dierbergs, Coborn's, Cub Foods, Hen House, and Walmart. Influencers also linked to a

specialty-created recipe hub, [Dairy Cooks](#), where each recipe connects to a retailer shopping cart.

While actual sales data will not be available until March, we can share these encouraging results:

- We had 23 million consumer impressions, exceeding our goal by almost 3 million impressions.
- We had 23,614 dairy products placed in shopping carts. Of those dairy products, 9,192 were gallons of milk.
- Blog views and engagements and Instagram photo engagements were exceptionally high for the food and beverage industry.
- Our media return on investment was almost double. That is, the estimated value of organic content creation, views, and engagement was double our investment.

Stay tuned for actual sales data in March, which will tell us if shopping carts resulted in purchases.

End Note: While this campaign was recipe/sales driven, all influencers received background information on dairy farmers' sustainability practices as well as dairy's nutrient value. One [influencer](#) made a point of sharing how his work with Midwest Dairy inspired trust:

"As you know, I love sharing information with you. Being a vegetarian (going on 17 years), I have always tried to make educated and careful decisions on where my food (and especially dairy) comes from. Working with Midwest Dairy in partnership with this post, I learned a few things about milk (other than it tastes really good!) that I think you should know:

- U.S. dairy is committed to be an environmental solution and to increase on what it means to be environmentally responsible in the dairy industry.
- Dairy foods are linked to health benefits like reduced inflammation, improved digestive health and healthy immune systems.

Sometimes it really is the simplest of things that are the best, like my Overnight Eggnog made with whole milk."

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Dairy farmers, milk recognized in Super Bowl ad

Dairy farmers and milk were highlighted in a touching three-minute ad, titled "Essential", just before Super Bowl LV on February 7. Featured in the ad was the Hughes family, owners of Sunsett Dairy in Pittsville, Wisconsin. The ad recognized the contributions of essential workers from a variety of professions who have worked throughout the pandemic to meet people's needs.

The ad is significant in that it reflects the evolution of the years-long partnership checkoff has with the National Football League (NFL), which has grown from support for school feeding programs that include milk and dairy to inclusion in value-added opportunities such as free public service announcements, the NFL's "My Cause My Cleats" and many other programs.

To learn more about the Essential video, click [here](#).

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Driving dairy demand through synergistic partnerships

The latest episode of Midwest Dairy's Dairy on the Air podcast – [Driving Dairy Demand Through Synergistic Partnerships](#) – features a conversation with Jon Moss, chief brand officer/senior vice president at Pizza Ranch. Moss shares how strategic partnerships between Pizza Ranch and Midwest Dairy have been mutually beneficial for driving demand during the pandemic and beyond.

In a discussion with Dairy on the Air host Andy Vance, Moss details the original partnership that celebrated National Dairy Month in 2020 by offering free extra cheese to customers who purchased online. This raised awareness about Pizza Ranch's carryout and delivery offerings, since dining rooms across the region were largely closed due to COVID-19, and the majority of their sales had previously been in-restaurant due to their popular buffets. In addition, the partnership resulted in Pizza Ranch purchasing more than 100,000 incremental pounds of cheese in the month, equating to more than 1 million incremental pounds of milk. Pizza Ranch also shared messaging about dairy farmers with customers, celebrating how sustainable, local and fresh dairy products are.

Moss also described how this initial partnership has now led to a more extensive partnership between Pizza Ranch and Midwest Dairy, along with other organizations with similar goals. This partnership has helped successfully launch Pizza Ranch's frozen breakfast pizza line, which is a win-win for all involved, generating incremental sales and customer satisfaction across the board.

This Dairy on the Air episode, and others, can be download on iTunes, Google Play, Stitcher, iHeartRadio or your favorite podcast platform. You can also listen to this, and all Dairy on the Air episodes, directly on [MidwestDairy.com](https://www.midwestdairy.com).

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Midwest Dairy shares how new strategic plan will help build trust and dairy sales

Findings from our recent dairy farmer survey show that dairy farmers rank dairy and ag media publications as their top source for information about the dairy industry. Given this feedback, Midwest Dairy CEO Molly Pelzer recently talked with a variety of ag media reporters to share how our new three-year strategic plan, launched in January, will guide checkoff to achieve these key objectives to continue to provide value for dairy farmers' checkoff investment:

- Increase dairy sales
- Grow trust in dairy
- Advance research in dairy
- Create dairy checkoff advocates
- Develop farm & community leaders for dairy

This ag media campaign has so far resulted in 32 media placements. This coverage across our 10-state region includes eight radio interviews, nine television segments, nine online stories and six print pieces.

Midwest Dairy's 2021-2023 strategic plan provides the roadmap for our ongoing partnerships with retailers, school foodservice and thought leaders to drive sales and build trust in dairy at a time when consumers are increasingly turning to the category for comfort, nutrition and value. We know that today's consumers continue to be curious about where their food comes from, and a key focus of our ongoing work will be to showcase dairy farmers' ongoing commitment to environmental stewardship and share how dairy foods are good for consumers as well as made with care for the planet.

To learn more about how Midwest Dairy is focusing on this important work, check out these stories: [AgWeek](#), [Farm Progress](#), [Farm Week](#), [Brownfield Ag News](#), [Rural Radio Network](#) and [Red River Farm Network](#).

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Delivering the goods on dairy foods during National Nutrition Month

Like the popular saying goes, March comes "in like a lion, out like a lamb," and many of us may be coming off of a heavy winter but hoping to shift some habits before warmer, spring-like conditions take hold. Largely, this means getting back to a more nutritious and healthy eating regimen.

Thankfully, March is National Nutrition Month, which helps us identify better food options and more positive eating habits. While Dairy Management, Inc. rolls out some fun and engaging ways to think about dairy as a

[smart, nutritious choice for our diets](#), individual farmers can help bring this to life in more personal and local ways.

If you're active on social media, think about sharing ways your family is eating healthier with dairy. [Smoothies](#) will be key on a national level this year with the Smoothie Bowl in partnership with the NFL. Consider joining in on the fun with this theme by creating and sharing your favorite smoothie recipes throughout the month.

Beyond smoothies, National Nutrition Month allows us to remind consumers about the sustainable wholesomeness coming from our dairies every day.

- [National Cereal Day](#) is March 7, providing a perfect opportunity to celebrate milk's role in this iconic food pairing.
- Have you recently supported a local school lunch/milk program?
- Celebrate the dairy plus plant food trend by sharing some of your favorites like [creamy soups](#) or [fruit-filled yogurt creations](#).

Whether sharing on social media, word-of-mouth conversations with family and friends, or participating in a healthy eating or lifestyle program (like getting involved in one of the [80 St. Patrick's Day runs/walks](#) throughout the Midwest), March is the perfect time to turn up the volume on the better-for-you benefits you're bringing our local and national food system.

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