

# Midwest Dairy 2024 Annual Report

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# Financials

## Midwest Dairy Program Expense Areas

*Total Expenses: \$25 Million*

**National Projects and Partnerships (25%)** – The 2.5 cent funding sent to Dairy Management Inc. for research & promotion and the United Dairy Industry Association fee, both a part of our membership commitment.

**Dairy Experience (41%)** – Consumer-focused programming and implementation of key components of the dairy checkoff's nationwide Unified Marketing Plan.

- **Sales – Demand (13%)** – Building dairy sales through retail, food service
- **Sales – Youth (1%)** – Drive dairy sales, including work with targeted school districts
- **Trust – Thought Leaders (7%)** – Relationship building with credentialed health and sustainability professionals to create dairy advocates
- **Trust – Adult (12%)** – The Undeniably Dairy platform and other marketing communications using third-party influencers to reach consumers
- **Trust – Youth (7%)** – Ag literacy programs to drive awareness of sustainable nutrition through programs to grow trust among youth and their parents
- **Strategic Insights (1%)** – Evaluating consumer attitude and behavior to measure trends in consumer trust

**Research (6%)** – Product research through the Midwest Dairy Food Research Center and efforts focused on nutrition research and consumer insights.

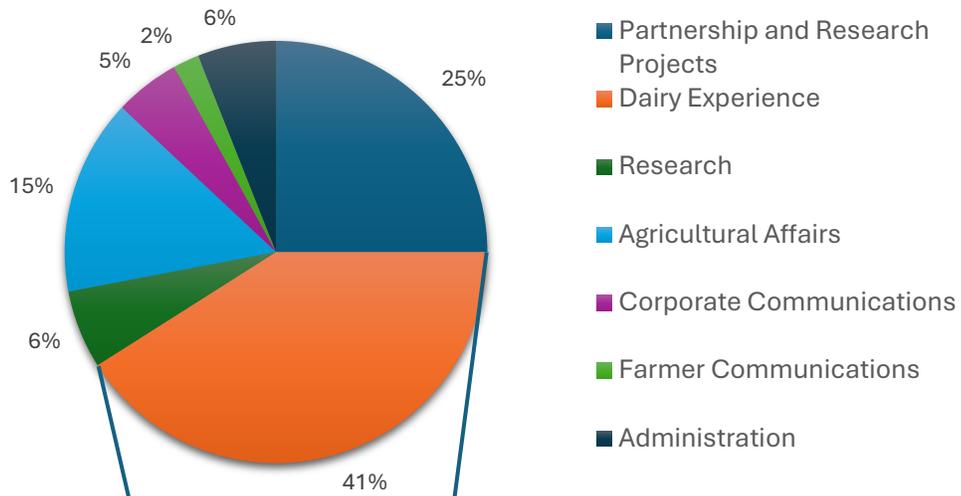
**Ag Affairs (15%)** – Leadership development with farmers and dairy ambassadors. Coalition-building with other ag groups and providing resources to support dairy farmers.

**Corporate Communications (5%)** – Positioning with stakeholders, distributing content through digital channels, and issues preparedness.

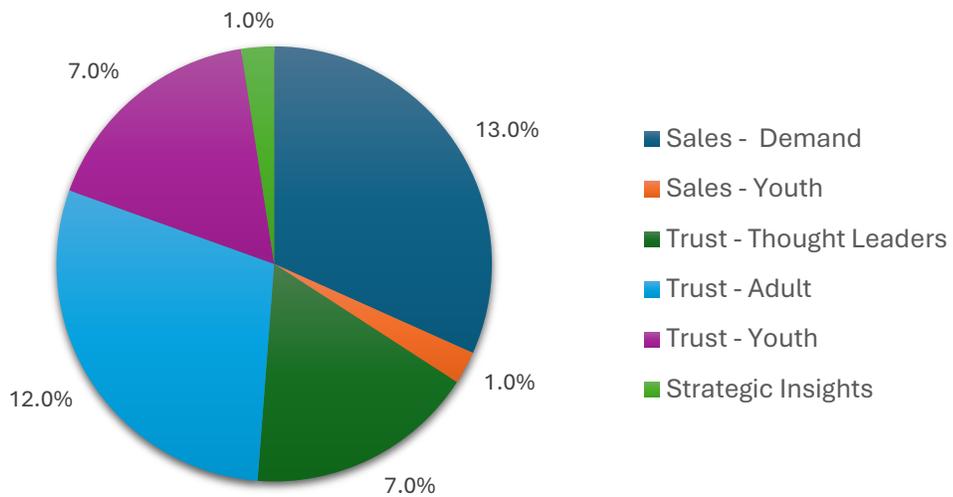
**Farmer Communications (2%)** – Communication with internal audiences, including farmer investors, board members, and employees.

**Administration (6%)** – Includes the cost of our accounting and network infrastructure, as well as our governance of board costs.

### 2024 Expenses by Spending Category



### Dairy Experience Breakdown

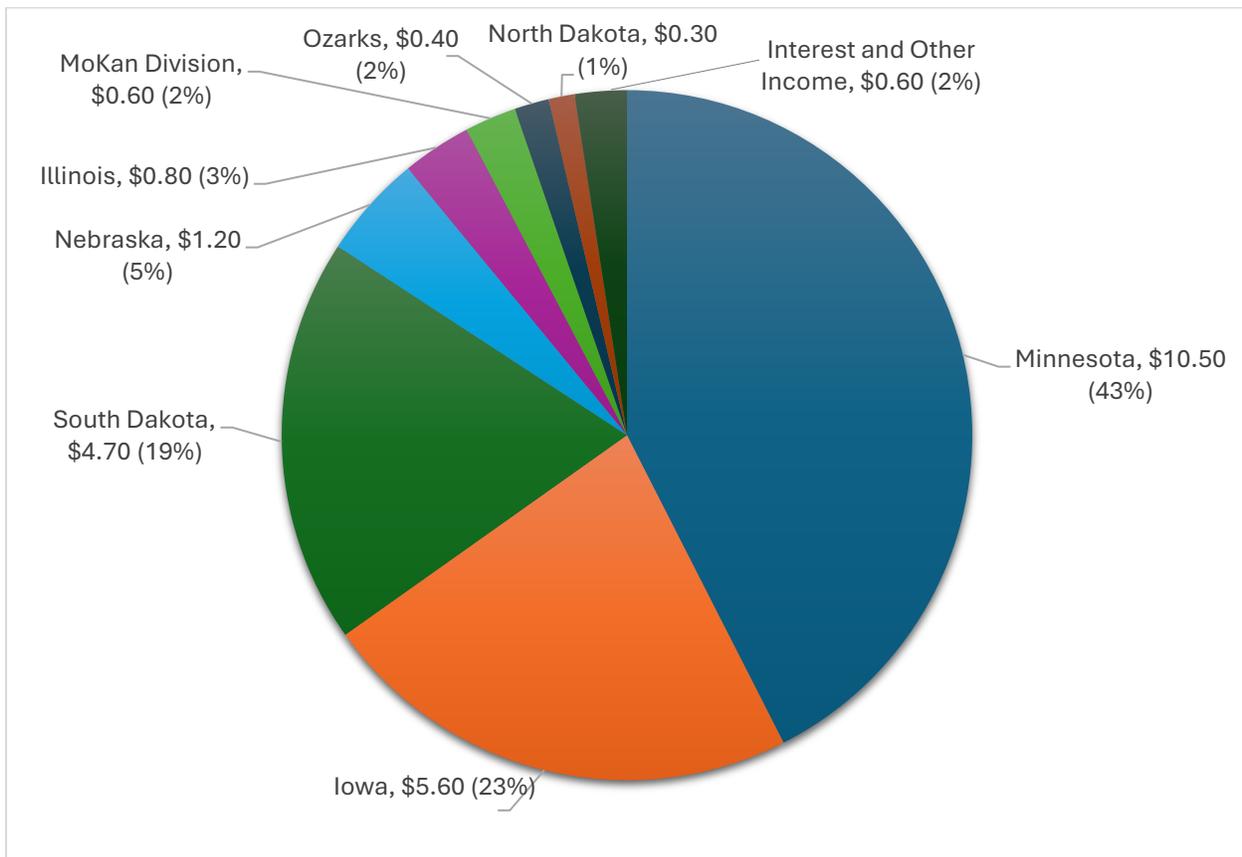


## Midwest Dairy Program Income Areas

### 2024 Revenue by Division (\$000,000)

Total Revenue: \$24.7 Million

<b>Minnesota</b>	\$10.50	42.3%
<b>Iowa</b>	\$5.60	22.7%
<b>South Dakota</b>	\$4.70	19.0%
<b>Nebraska</b>	\$1.20	4.9%
<b>Illinois</b>	\$0.80	3.0%
<b>MoKan Division</b>	\$0.60	2.6%
<b>Ozarks</b>	\$0.40	1.8%
<b>North Dakota</b>	\$0.30	1.1%
<b>Interest and Other Income</b>	\$0.60	2.6%



# Midwest Dairy Leadership

## Corey Scott, CEO

Corey Scott is the CEO of Midwest Dairy, the dairy promotion organization that works on behalf of dairy farm families across 10 Midwestern states to build trust and demand for dairy products. Scott is the organization's fourth CEO in its nearly 25-year history. Her long-standing service to dairy farmers throughout her career has allowed Scott to see firsthand the passion farmers show for their cows, the environment, and their communities. She is incredibly grateful for the opportunity to lead such a respected checkoff organization.



Scott joined Midwest Dairy in March of 2024. Prior to Midwest Dairy, Scott served as the Vice President of Sales and Marketing for Athian and held several leadership positions for over 15 years with Land O'Lakes and its sustainability division, Truterra LLC. Currently, she resides in Marine on Saint Croix, Minnesota. Scott received her Executive MBA and undergraduate degrees from the University of Minnesota and the Carlson School of Business. Notably, in 2023, she was selected as one of GreenBiz's 12 Women Cultivating Sustainable Food Systems and earned a U.S. Dairy Sustainability Award for her work in reducing dairy's overall environmental footprint.

In her role as CEO, Scott supports the Midwest Dairy Board and provides strategic guidance to Midwest Dairy's staff as they work to fulfill both the organization's vision to bring dairy to life and its mission to give consumers an excellent dairy experience. Scott's passion for sustainability fuels the organization's commitment to consumer-centric goals, driving sales and building consumer trust in dairy. Through her leadership, Midwest Dairy maximizes dairy farmers' investment in the dairy checkoff by strategically collaborating with and through partners and focusing on research, leading to the development of products that meet the needs of today's changing consumer.

Within this position, Scott plays the lead role in ensuring the Midwest dairy industry captures its share of the growing global and domestic demand for dairy. Consumers in the U.S. and worldwide are increasingly turning to dairy foods because they taste great and offer a strong nutritional profile that includes protein, a nutrient many seek. The U.S. dairy industry is committed to sustainable nutrition, a position recognized favorably among domestic and multinational food companies.

## Charles Krause, Chair

Charles Krause, of Krause Holsteins, located in Buffalo, Minnesota, is the chair of Midwest Dairy. Krause Holsteins is a multigenerational dairy farm that first began in 1959 and currently milks around 350 cows. The Krause family has been farming in Wright County for over 150 years, and Krause himself is a fifth-generation farmer. Krause and his wife, Robyn, graduated from the University of Minnesota in 1991 and then had the opportunity to join the family farm full-time. Krause also farms with his son, Andrew, and his daughter, Morgan, helps wherever needed. Krause grows his own feed on 500 acres.



Krause plays a prominent role in the dairy promotion industry. In addition to serving as Midwest Dairy chair, he has been an officer on the Midwest Dairy division board since 2007 and a member of the corporate board since 2010. His past officer position includes being the corporate board first vice chair since 2016. He also serves on the United Dairy Industry Association (UDIA) board as the Secretary and serves the Global Dairy Platform as a United States Ambassador.

In the past, Krause has received recognition as:

- Farmer Communicator of the Year award from the National Milk Producers Federation
- National Dairy Shrine Progressive Dairyemen of the Year
- Minnesota Milk Producer of the Year
- Dairy Farmers of America Members of Distinction
- Minnesota FFA Hall of Fame Inductee

Krause is also involved in a variety of dairy and community leadership positions such as Dairy Farmers of America-Central Area Council Vice Chair, Centra Sota Cooperative Board of Directors and the Buffalo FFA Alumni. In his spare time, Charles enjoys traveling with his wife, Robyn.

## 2024 Corporate Board Officers



Corporate Board members include Dan Hotvedt, First Vice Chair; Charles Krause, Chair; Rita Young, Secretary; Bill Deutsch, Second Vice Chair; and Matt Schelling, Treasurer.

## Division Board Leadership: Illinois Division



*Bold indicates Corporate Board Member*

- Doug Block, Pearl City
- **Bill Deutsch, Sycamore**
- Kristi Dinderman, Orangeville
- Frank Doll, Pocahontas
- Bryan Henrichs, Breese
- Amy Hildebrandt, South Beloit
- David Jarden, Staunton
- Kurt Johnson, Greenville
- Kappy Koch, Tremont
- Donald Mackinson, Pontiac
- Glen Meier, Ridott
- Craig Meng, Freeburg
- **Brent Mueller, Garden Prairie**
- Steve Obert, Orangeville
- Toby Probst, Wheeler

### Board Officers:

- Chair – Bill Deutsch
- Vice Chair – Brent Mueller
- Secretary – Amy Hildebrandt
- Treasurer – Glen Meier

## Division Board Leadership: Iowa Division



*Bold indicates Corporate Board Member*

- Pam Bolin, Clarksville
- **Doug Carroll, Ryan**
- Gerrit Davelaar, Inwood
- Dan Dietzenbach, Fort Atkinson
- Jeff Dresser, Keokuk
- Jolene Duitscher, Rolfe
- **Alan Feuerhelm, Le Mars**
- Fred Hall (Ex Officio), ISU
- **Robert Horst, Bristow**
- **Dan Hotvedt, Decorah**
- Patrick Jones, Spencer
- **Lee Maassen, Maurice**
- Dennis Mashek, Calmar
- Anthony Nunes, Sibley
- Josie Rozum, Ely
- **Matt Schelling, Orange City**
- **Jonna Schutte, Monona**
- Matt Simon, Dyersville
- Madison Skubal, Wayland

### Board Officers:

- Chair – Lee Maassen
- Vice Chair – Jonna Schutte
- Secretary – Dan Dietzenbach
- Treasurer – Pam Bolin

## Division Board Leadership: Minnesota Division



*Bold indicates Corporate Board Member*

- **Anthony Anderson, Henning**
- **Mindi Arendt, Mazeppa**
- Angie Barlau (Ex Officio), Waverly
- Megan Herberg, St. Peter
- **Eric Hoese, Mayer**
- **Shirley Hulinsky, Burtrum**
- **Margaret Johnson, Fountain**
- **Karen Kasper, Owatonna**
- **Charles Krause, Buffalo**
- **Sarah Kuechle, Eden Valley**
- **Kate McAndrews, Sauk Centre**
- Wayne Saemrow, Waterville
- **Dave Schwartz, Slayton**
- Eric Sonnek, Foreston
- **Kristine Spadgenske, Menahga**
- Rita Vander Kooi (Ex Officio), Worthington
- Annie Vannurden, Royalton
- **Suzanne Vold, Glenwood**
- **Rita Young, Plainview**

Board Officers:

- Chair – Kristine Spadgenske
- Vice Chair – Kate McAndrews
- Secretary – Mindi Arendt
- Treasurer – Rita Young

## Division Board Leadership: MoKan Division



*Bold indicates Corporate Board Member*

- Darren Benfer, Longford
- Ted Bruemmer, Jefferson City
- Lynda Foster, Fort Scott
- Brian Haverkamp, Seneca
- Chris Heins, Higginsville
- **Byron Lehman, Newton**
- Orville Miller, Hutchinson
- Tom Oelrichs, Mora
- Steve Ohlde, Linn
- **Alex Peterson, Trenton**
- David Rottinghaus, Seneca
- Steve Strickler, Iola
- Donna Telle, Uniontown
- Heidi Wells, Milton

### Board Officers:

- Chair – Byron Lehman
- Vice chair – Steve Ohlde
- Secretary – Donna Telle
- Treasurer – Orville Miller

## Division Board Leadership: Nebraska Division



*Bold indicates Corporate Board Member*

- Mike Amen, Norfolk
- Greg Bleeker, Emerson
- Jodi Cast, Beaver Crossing
- David Crook, Humboldt
- Paul Kononoff, PhD (Ex Officio), UNL
- Doug Nuttelman, Stromsburg
- **Joyce Racicky, Mason City**
- Marshall Reece (Ex Officio), AMPI
- Larry Schuster, Pickrell
- Heath Snodgrass (Ex Officio), Orchard
- **Mary Temme, Wayne**

Board Officers:

- Chair – Joyce Racicky
- Vice Chair – Mary Temme
- Secretary/Treasurer – Jodi Cast

## Division Board Leadership: North Dakota Division



*Bold indicates Corporate Board Member*

- Johnny Campos (Ex Officio), Cass Clay
- Terry Entzminger, Jamestown
- Janal Hoff, Richardton
- Jennifer Holle, Mandan
- **Sue Kleingartner, Gackle**
- **Lilah Krebs, Gladstone**
- Nathan Kroh (Ex Officio), ND Department of Agriculture
- Kim Ledger, Bismarck
- Casey Murphy (Ex Officio), Cows & Co. Creamery
- Denise Rohweder, Wishek
- Guillermo Scaglia (Ex Officio), NDSU
- Toby Tormaschy, Richardton
- Piet vanBedaf, Carrington

Board Officers:

- Chair – Sue Kleingartner
- Vice Chair – Terry Entzminger
- Secretary – Kim Ledger
- Treasurer – Lilah Krebs

## Division Board Leadership: Ozarks Division



*Bold indicates Corporate Board Member*

- Marilyn Calvin, Mt. Vernon
- Charles Coblentz, Chouteau
- **Jack Dill, Conway**
- Earl Dotson, Marionville
- Mark Fellwock, Monett
- Bill Haak, Gentry
- Randy Mooney, Rogersville
- Carrie Rantz, Spokane
- **Nathan Roth, Mountain Grove**
- Norris Sloan, Mountain Grove
- Scott VanZyverden, Marshfield
- Craig Westfall, Halfway

### Board Officers:

- Chair – Nathan Roth
- Vice Chair – Marilyn Calvin
- Secretary – Carrie Rantz
- Treasurer – Mark Fellwock

## Division Board Leadership: South Dakota Division



*Bold indicates Corporate Board Member*

- Londa Nwadike (Ex Officio), SDSU
- Jogchum Andringa, Brandt
- Riley Boadwine, Baltic
- Dorothy Elliott, Lake Norden
- Evan Grong (Ex Officio), Valley Queen Cheese
- Cole Hoyer, Bruce
- Maartje Lemstra, Humboldt
- Kim Maher (Ex Officio), Agropur
- **Allen Merrill, Parker**
- James Neugebauer (Ex Officio), Dimock
- **Doug Ode, Brandon**
- Keven Pearson, Flandreau
- **Marv Post, Volga**
- Hunter Roberts (Ex Officio), SD Department of Agriculture
- Kevin Van Winkle, Canistota
- **Tom Walsh, Degraff, MN**

### Board Officers:

- Chair – Marv Post
- Vice Chair – Kevin Van Winkle
- Secretary – Maartje Lemstra
- Treasurer – Jogchum Andringa

# Trust

## Dairy thrives during the state fair season

Midwest Dairy was excited to engage with consumers at state fairs throughout the 10-state region. These popular state celebrations provide numerous opportunities for people to explore and learn about all things dairy. Many state fairs even saw record-breaking attendance this year. Midwest Dairy proudly showcased how dairy products are responsibly and sustainably produced to a wide audience through interactive booths, dairy displays, hands-on activities, butter sculptures, and more. A key highlight of the fair is participation by those who show their dedication and passion behind one of the Midwest's most beloved industries.

### Illinois

The Illinois Dairy Ambassadors went to work during the Illinois State Fair as hundreds of thousands of Illinoisans descended upon Springfield. Impeccable weather brought big crowds and record-breaking sales to the Dairy Building in 2024.

Fairgoers enjoyed the Cozy Cow Lounge that debuted at this year's fair which helps fairgoers understand everything dairy farmers are doing to put cows first and ensure they are well cared for. Dairy farmers and staff engaged with fairgoers through games and activities such as cornhole, promoting "Cows Come First" messaging throughout the lounge. The Undeniably Dairy photo booth was another huge hit, with over 8,900 photos being sent via text message. The photo booth also incorporated the Cows Come First theme.

Another popular attraction was the Butter Cow. Sarah Pratt of West Des Moines, Iowa, carved the 2024 Illinois State Fair Butter Cow, which followed this year's fair theme, "It's Show Time!" and featured the iconic cow alongside her friend, a magician pulling seven scoops of ice cream out of a hat. This year's Flavor of the Fair was Raspberry Crunch, a cold treat consisting of layers of vanilla ice cream, tart raspberries, and granola.

This delicious treat proved popular, with over 2,200 Raspberry Crunch shakes sold. The Illinois State Fair also was an excellent opportunity to build relationships with Illinois Dairy Farmers. Midwest Dairy passed out ice cream coupons at the exhibitor meeting, sponsored a pizza party for junior exhibitors, purchased the Land of Lincoln cow print at the Governor's Sale of Champions, and sponsored lunch for the State 4-H dairy judging contest.

### Iowa

Each summer, the Iowa State Fair becomes a vibrant celebration of the state's agricultural heritage, drawing record visitors to experience the best of Iowa's farming traditions. This year, the Iowa State Fair set a new all-time attendance record with 1,182,682 people attending the 11-day event.

A notable highlight of dairy farmer participation at the fair was the Farm to Fair Meal. This event provides 300 consumers a unique opportunity to connect directly with food producers. Held in the fair's Pavilion, the meal highlights the journey of Iowa products from the farm to the fairgrounds. Guests enjoyed a variety of dishes made with locally sourced dairy ingredients. This event also featured educational components as five dairy farm families shared their stories and insights on dairy farming. The yummy dairy food did not stop there! No visit to the Iowa State Fair

would be complete without indulging in ice cream at the Dairy Barn. The Raspberry Cheesecake Frozen Yogurt Flavor of the Fair stood out among the fair's ice cream offerings.

To connect with a new generation of fairgoers, Midwest Dairy partnered with Iowa Corn, Iowa Beef Council, Iowa Turkey Federation, Iowa Soybean Association, and Iowa Pork to host Ag Trivia. More than 200 consumers participated in the event, answering questions about food, farming, and sustainability.

Another crowd favorite is the Butter Cow, carved by Sarah Pratt of West Des Moines. The Butter Cow celebrated iconic late-night celebrities Johnny Carson, Steve Higgins, and Jimmy Fallon, along with a sky glider seat to commemorate the 50th year of the Main Sky Glider. Lastly, the Iowa State Fair celebrates the dairy industry's future through the Dairy Princess and Ambassador programs. During the fair, these leaders participated in kitchen demonstrations, volunteered with the Iowa Food and Family Project, and led Kids' Club activities.

## Kansas

During the 2024 Kansas State Fair, Midwest Dairy focused on sharing delicious dairy recipes with consumers. With 328,714 fairgoers attending the 10-day event, this was the perfect opportunity to connect with consumers and help them incorporate dairy into their kitchens.

Amanda Miller, a fourth-generation dairy farmer from Hutchison, Kansas, partnered with Midwest Dairy to share dairy's sustainability story and nutritional benefits while demonstrating easy, delicious, dairy-centered recipes. Miller has conducted cooking demonstrations in her local community for almost 10 years. She uses Kansas-sourced products as much as possible and encourages consumers to do the same, including dairy products from their local grocery stores. Miller shared some of her favorite dairy recipes with fairgoers, including Chocolate Peanut Butter Cottage Cheese Ice Cream and Jammy Cheesy Yogurt Dip.

## Minnesota

This great Minnesota get-together drew nearly two million visitors during the last weeks of summer—five of the 12 days of the fair broke all-time attendance records. Midwest Dairy's presence emphasized the role of dairy farmers in sustainable nutrition and the goodness of dairy products.

The 71st Princess Kay of the Milky Way, Rachel Visser of Hutchinson, Minnesota, was crowned and officially began her reign. Visser participated in 39 media appearances, including trivia games and taste-testing with Twin Cities radio personalities. Along with the Princess Kay finalists, she participated in daily events, including Agri-lympics, dairy cattle shows, and the Moo Booth. Special guests at the famous butter carving booth included Governor and Vice-Presidential candidate Tim Walz, Senator Amy Klobuchar, and representatives from the Canadian Consulate.

The education booth engaged consumers with trivia and giveaways, each providing a different method of spreading sustainable nutrition messaging. Princess Kay finalists held one-on-one conversations about cow care, the dairy industry's sustainability achievements and goals, and the concept of "poop to power." Farmers also got a chance to interact with consumers at one of the State Fair's most popular attractions, the CHS Miracle of Birth Center. While H5N1 concerns

meant no calves in the barn, dairy farmers brought their experience and knowledge into conversations with fairgoers. All farmers who volunteered had previously graduated from Midwest Dairy's Dairy Experience and Agricultural Leadership program.

Lastly, the fair encountered unexpected challenges, including power outages and severe storms. Despite these challenges, sales at the Dairy Goodness Bar hit record-breaking revenue, reflecting a 3% increase from 2023, while the All You Can Drink Milk Stand saw a 17% increase in sales.

## Missouri

The 2024 Missouri State Fair in Sedalia allowed Midwest Dairy to introduce something new this year — a Flavor of the Fair ice cream treat. Missouri Governor Mike Parson personally selected the inaugural Flavor of the Fair, Kingdom Crunchdown. Served for this fair season only, the winning combination featured layers of vanilla soft serve ice cream, strawberries, and crunchy milk chocolate candy, topped with chocolate syrup and gold sprinkles. Fairgoers raved about this yummy flavor, and one fairgoer noted, "It's worth the price of admission!"

This year's butter cow sculpture, a well-known Missouri State Fair attraction with a 19-year history, used nearly 600 pounds of unsalted butter. Returning sculptor Ander Weis carved the "Lost in a Dairy Tale" sculpture, which took 100 hours to complete.

Midwest Dairy's partnership with the Missouri Wine and Grape Board brought dairy to unexpected places like a Wine 101 pairing class. This class attracted 400 participants who sampled Applewood Smoked Cheddar and a Taco Cheddar cheese curd from Hemme Brothers Creamery. Participants left with a cheeseboard inspiration handout to bring the dairy experience home.

Finally, the Kansas City Mom Collective partnered with Midwest Dairy to promote the State Fair as a family-friendly day trip. Kansas City Mom Collective is committed to creating an encouraging and supportive online and offline community for the moms of Kansas City. One mom and online creator took the Collective's followers on a fun-filled day at the fair, encouraging them to visit and learn about dairy. The social media outreach, including an Instagram reel, Facebook post, and article, reached more than 26,000 people. Featured fair stops included the butter cow and food from the Gerken Dairy Center for her 22,000 followers, directing them to the article "Mom's Guide to the Missouri State Fair."

## Nebraska

With the support of partners, Midwest Dairy reached consumers through various activations that helped build trust during the 2024 Nebraska State Fair.

Over Labor Day weekend, Chef Nadar of Billy's Restaurant in Lincoln provided four cooking demonstrations. Partnering with the Nebraska Pork Producers Association, Midwest Dairy hosted Deliciousness with Dairy & Pork and served nearly 500 sample food boats to a packed crowd.

Nebraska's Largest Classroom, a three-day event, welcomed 3,400 elementary students during the fair. Midwest Dairy staff, dairy farmers, advocate volunteers, and Nebraska Dairy Ambassadors shared dairy's sustainable nutrition story at the dairy exhibit in the Raising Nebraska building. During the dairy presentation, students enjoyed cold milk from Nebraska State Fair partner Hiland Dairy. Fair attendees visited the Undeniably Dairy Booth, which featured various messages about the sustainable nutrition story of dairy through handouts, QR codes, and dairy swag. The dairy display showcased all seven dairy cow breeds managed by the "Moo Crew," which is comprised of dairy farmers and advocates. The "Moo Crew" provided highly attended milking demonstrations in the milking parlor 52 times over the 11-day fair. During the demonstrations, attendees could ask questions, and more than 150 coupons for the ice cream parlor were distributed. These ice cream coupons included scan codes directing them to the Undeniably Dairy site for more information about the health benefits of dairy. In collaboration with the milking demonstration, Prairie Promise Lean Beef provided more than 1,700 string cheese sticks as a nutritious snack for fair attendees.

## South Dakota

Midwest Dairy continues to partner with the South Dakota State Fair to reach fairgoers of all ages. Last year, this partnership led to updated signage on the Dakota Marketplace, home to the Dairy Bar, where fairgoers enjoy ice cream and all-you-can-drink milk. Additional updates kept the dairy space modern for this year's fair. In 2024, utilizing Midwest Dairy's Undeniably Dairy grant funds, a local artist painted a mural of various breeds of dairy cows on the dairy barn at the South Dakota State Fair for all to enjoy.

Continuing its partnership with Discover Dairy, Midwest Dairy provided dairy education resources and signage to over 50 teachers through the State's Largest Classroom program. Midwest Dairy also donated over 700 cartons of milk to be enjoyed in students' lunches.

Midwest Dairy sponsored several events throughout the fair, including an ice cream social at the Value-Added Ag Day, ice cream bars at the 4-H Leaders Appreciation Evening, and malt coupons at the Farm Bureau Centennial Farms Presentation. Midwest Dairy and Valley Queen Cheese provided milk and cheese sticks to dairy exhibitors and those watching the dairy shows. Dairy was also featured in the scavenger hunt hosted by the Farm Bureau, where over 750 ice cream coupons were given as prizes.

## Building bridges: How social influencers are partnering with checkoff to share the dairy story

Midwest Dairy partners with online influencers to connect with Generation Z (Gen Z) and adult consumers by showcasing stories about sustainable nutrition in dairy. These influencers use their trusted platforms to promote dairy products and experiences. As a result, Midwest Dairy has increased dairy product visibility, expanded reach to target audiences, and boosted sales through authentic dairy content. Social media is a multibillion-dollar industry that drives more engagement than other entertainment sectors, making it a key tool for Midwest Dairy to connect with consumers.

Midwest Dairy expanded its influencer relationships during the second half of 2024. Keep reading to learn about these influencer activations!

### “Cheesy Season” engages influencers

In late 2024, as food discussions heightened ahead of the holidays, Midwest Dairy launched a campaign called “Cheesy Season.” This campaign showcased dairy’s versatility and enjoyment through strategic partnerships with influencers. The goal was to raise awareness and engage Gen Z and parents across key digital platforms.

Midwest Dairy collaborated with influencers such as Faith Enokian, Molly Yeh, and newlyweds Jay and Channing to produce engaging content for Instagram and TikTok. The campaign generated 10.1 million impressions, including 2.3 million organic impressions. It also achieved a strong average organic engagement rate of 5.74%, surpassing industry benchmarks.

The campaign featured interactive challenges, day-in-the-life videos, and recipe tutorials to emphasize dairy’s versatility, sustainability, and kitchen fun. Gen Z responded particularly well to humor, interactive content, and visually dynamic storytelling, confirming the importance of these strategies for future campaigns.

### Influencers highlight dairy’s role in the first 1,000 days of life

In Fall 2024, Midwest Dairy partnered with TikTok creators to emphasize dairy’s vital role in a child’s first 1,000 days. This initiative educated parents and caregivers about the nutritional benefits of dairy for early development through engaging and informative content from trusted parenting voices.

Research shows that the first 1,000 days of life from conception to their second birthday- are crucial for brain development, physical growth, and immune strength. Dairy, rich in essential nutrients such as calcium, vitamin D, and protein, is a foundational part of a child’s diet during this time. Midwest Dairy worked with medical experts and popular influencers to share this vital message in a way that resonated with today’s parents.

Four medical experts launched the campaign by creating TikTok videos explaining the benefits of dairy during a child’s first 1,000 days. They highlighted how dairy supports healthy bones, teeth, and overall growth in young children, laying the foundation for a more resilient and active future. After the medical experts posted their videos, parent influencers shared them and added their

personal stories. This strategy broadened the reach while keeping the message authentic and relatable. A couple of the high performing videos were produced by @skye hitchcock and @itsbethanymorris.

The collaboration exceeded expectations, generating 2.6 million impressions. By leveraging both organic and paid media strategies, the campaign reached a wide audience, including parents, caregivers, and health-conscious individuals.

## Influencer campaign highlights key messages of animal and sustainability

In 2024, Illinois Farm Families (IFF) collaborated with Midwest Dairy on a strategic influencer campaign to increase awareness and trust among Chicago consumers about the practices of Illinois farmers. The campaign highlighted themes such as family farming, animal care, and sustainability. It focused on connecting consumers directly with farm experiences through the perspectives of relatable and trusted influencers. Two prominent influencers — Christina Chu, a sports dietitian, and Aneta Linko, a parenting blogger — connected Chicago-based audiences to Illinois dairy farm families.

Christina, a sports nutrition expert, was invited to Lenkaitis Dairy Farm to gain firsthand experience in animal care and nutrition. In her content, she emphasized the shared mission of dairy nutritionists and dietitians to ensure the health and well-being of dairy cows. Her unique perspective as a dietitian allowed her to highlight dairy's nutritional importance and the crucial role of proper animal care in producing high-quality goods. Christina shared a post titled "10 Things I Learned from an Illinois Dairy Farmer," providing deeper insight into her on-farm experience. She showcased key information about dairy cow diets, daily routines, and the state-of-the-art equipment used to maintain the farm. This bonus content resonated with her audience, providing educational value while highlighting the behind-the-scenes commitment to animal welfare and sustainable farming practices.

Aneta, a Chicago parenting blogger, engaged fellow parents with Midwest Dairy's key messages about animal care. In early December, Aneta also visited Lenkaitis Dairy Farm with her family. Through her content, Aneta highlighted the importance of animal care on the farm, the family values that guide the operation, and the quality of dairy products it produces. Her relatable storytelling resonated with parents who were interested in where their food comes from and how it is produced.

Collaborating with influencers produced remarkable outcomes, reaching a broad audience and fostering significant engagement. The influencers generated 255,048 impressions and 55,981 engagements. The campaign boosted awareness and engagement among consumers in Illinois, highlighting the significance of family farming, animal care, and sustainability within the dairy farming industry.

## Driving conversations about dairy on TikTok

Because many consumers use TikTok as a source of information and education, Midwest Dairy worked to drive conversation about dairy farming, emphasizing cow care and industry sustainability efforts like water conservation.

Midwest Dairy collaborated with 34 influencers to produce 39 videos. Most of the participants were Gen Z influencers or had a strong Gen Z following. This diverse group of influencers included mothers, athletes, fitness creators, and others who highlighted the benefits of dairy through recipe demos and day-in-the-life recaps. Their goal was to demonstrate how dairy authentically integrates into their everyday lives. A few of the high performing videos were produced by @courtneyrolson, @jessicajordan44, and @adventuresinoklahoma.

The videos generated 5.26 million impressions, exceeding Midwest Dairy's original goal of 4 million by 29%. Midwest Dairy also conducted a brand lift study to assess whether the campaign successfully changed perceptions and built trust. Compared to those who did not see the videos, individuals exposed to the videos had an 11-point increase in their perception of dairy animals being treated humanely and a 5-point increase in their view of dairy farmers as environmentally friendly.

## Grant funds fuel community engagement and dairy promotion in 2024

Undeniably Dairy Grants help farmers promote the benefits of dairy for individuals, the environment, and local communities. These grants help farmers engage with their communities, with a special focus on Gen Z. These grants allow farmers to connect with their communities and share their stories. The funds can be used for local promotional activities highlighting dairy's advantages for people, the planet, and families.

In 2024, 134 grants totaling over \$348,000 were awarded. Farmers have demonstrated impressive creativity in applying for these grants. Below are a few examples of recipients who have promoted dairy in fun and impactful ways.

### Iowa – Farm to Fork Event

Farmer Doug Carrol's "Farm to Fork" event connected local farmers, chefs, and consumers. This gathering encouraged discussions about sustainable practices employed on modern farms and showcased dairy products, including flavored butters and charcuterie trays.

Each course began with an explanation of the food's sourcing and local processing methods. The bread course featured three different flavored butters, while the charcuterie tray showcased a selection of cheeses. The meal concluded with flavored ice cream. Attendees were excited to learn about the food's local origins and how farmers support the community and the environment. A total of 100 consumers attended the event.

### Illinois – PC Powers UP with Dairy Project

The "PC Powers UP with DAIRY" project was developed by the Prairie Central FFA Chapter to promote the consumption of dairy products within the school district's athletic programs. This initiative educated local communities about the importance of dairy in athletes' diets and highlighted dairy farmers' commitment to sustainability.

FFA members created concession stand signage and distributed infographics and dairy activity books to younger community members attending the athletic events. They incorporated the Undeniably Dairy brand into the signs and shared dairy facts emphasizing dairy's dietary benefits. They installed signs with weekly messages promoting the dairy industry, prominently featuring the Undeniably Dairy logo. These signs became a highlight, with many attendees inquiring about the information presented.

Cheese sticks were also introduced as a new staple on the concession menu, providing a nutrient-rich snack option. Since hundreds of people from the community attend athletic events—many of whom do not have a direct connection to agriculture—targeting these events proved to be an effective way to reach consumers. So far, the group has reported reaching approximately 3,000 people and looks forward to continuing dairy promotion in the coming years.

## Kansas – June Dairy Month Promotion

To celebrate June Dairy Month, Ashley Holle distributes dairy treat baskets to local daycares and sports teams in her community. In 2024, she used an Undeniably Dairy Grant to enhance her efforts. Holle provided local schools and daycares with bags filled with dairy promotional items, including bracelets, sunglasses, stickers, and positive messages about dairy. She distributed over 200 “dairy good” bags while educating children and their families about dairy nutrition. These bags reached families in Linn, Palmer, Firth, Nebraska, and Morrowville, Kansas.

## Minnesota – Dairy Summer Promotion

Amanda Zigan and her team collaborated with their local radio station to record dairy advertisements for 2024. KEYL is a radio station that reaches a broad audience of consumers with little connection to agriculture. Each of their eight dairy royalty ladies recorded an ad highlighting dairy nutrition, recipe versatility, dairy deliciousness, farm-to-table practices, and sustainability. They also informed listeners that dairy products would be available at a local ice cream truck. Listeners were encouraged to spot the Undeniably Dairy logo on the ice cream trailer or t-shirts worn by staff. They also printed 10-ounce plastic souvenir cups featuring the Undeniably Dairy logo for the ice cream trailer. This promotion reached over 5,000 consumers.

## Minnesota – Ag Learning Lab

Since 2023, 4-H programs in Freeborn, Rice, Steele, and Waseca counties have collaborated to create an “Ag Learning Lab” within their 4-H buildings during the county fairs. The Ag Learning Lab provides a welcoming space where youth and adults can engage in enjoyable agricultural activities and learn about food production, food waste, and more.

Dairy farmer Amy Nelson partnered with Waseca County 4-H to use an Undeniably Dairy Grant to create a “ReFuel with Chocolate Milk” station at the Ag Learning Lab during the fairs in Waseca, Rice, Freeborn, and Steele counties. This station included various physical challenges for participants to compete in and signage highlighting the benefits of refueling with chocolate milk. After completing an exercise challenge, attendees received a complimentary 8-ounce bottle of chocolate milk.

This initiative enhanced an existing 10-foot display showcasing dairy farming in the local counties and illustrated milk’s journey from farm to store. Grant funds also were used to purchase drawstring bags containing informational handouts about chocolate milk. The exhibit was strategically placed next to the American Farm Bureau Federation’s dairy display, where consumers watched videos of a working dairy farm narrated by Princess Kay of the Milky Way, Emma Kuball. By placing the exhibit at four popular county fairs in southern Minnesota, they reached an audience of approximately 2,000 consumers, including those who do not live on farms.

## Missouri – Ag Moves Summer Program

The Agriculture Education on the Move (Ag Moves) summer 2024 program targets future consumers in elementary students and Gen Z. The in-class curriculum focuses on Missouri agriculture, featuring a dairy lesson incorporating Undeniably Dairy messaging and hands-on

activities. Ag Moves partners with FFA chapters and universities to train Gen Z students, who teach the program in local classrooms.

Dairy farmer Heather Fletcher used the Undeniably Dairy brand to teach the Ag Moves dairy lesson in classrooms and outreach events. The lesson explores dairy's journey from farm to store, how dairy cattle are raised, and the year-round care farmers provide for their animals and land. Each session includes a hands-on activity, such as making homemade butter, allowing students to engage through seeing, touching, and tasting. This curriculum reached 3,727 students through in-class programming.

These in-classroom experiences and outreach events were facilitated by 21 college educators representing Ag Moves statewide. These young professionals trained with Ag Moves staff as educators and gained valuable classroom management and communication experience. This experience familiarized them with the Undeniably Dairy messaging, and they served as both representatives of Missouri Farmers Care, Ag Education on the Move, and the Undeniably Dairy brand.

## North Dakota – Kids Day on the Farm

Kids Day on the Farm was held at the Dickinson State University Multi-Purpose Arena. The event educated both local and visiting attendees about agriculture. While it primarily serves children in grades K-3, people of all ages are welcome, and many attendees from various age groups participate each year. This event helps those who are less familiar with agriculture understand its importance. It highlights how essential foods, such as dairy, contribute to nutrition, health, and the community's overall well-being.

An Undeniably Dairy Grant enhanced appreciation for dairy products while showcasing agriculture in southwestern North Dakota. The Undeniably Dairy brand and sustainability message educated attendees about dairy and other agricultural topics. Displays and activities reinforced positive messages about dairy. Several college students and local agricultural business representatives engaged with the children. At the end of their tour, each child received a goodie bag containing pencils, coloring books, informational pamphlets, and other items donated by Midwest Dairy. This event reached 1,400 consumers.

## Nebraska – Nebraska Ag in the Classroom

Agriculture in the Classroom (AITC) workshops offer hands-on activities for student teachers, integrating agriculture into K-12 education. These general education pre-service teachers, averaging 20 years old, receive quality materials for their teaching portfolios. The program serves about 300 teachers annually, operating on a budget of roughly \$30,000, with this grant supporting about 17%. Participants engage in activities showcasing the journey of milk.

An Undeniably Dairy Grant supported a teacher training workshop for college students preparing to be elementary and middle school teachers. The workshop focused on integrating milk into science education. Through hands-on activities, including a relay race timeline based on the National Agriculture in the Classroom lesson "Sun to Moo to You," students explored milk's journey from grass to cows to humans. They also completed a worksheet on types of energy while watching the "Journey of Milk" video from Dairy MAX. Additional resources were provided

through the Midwest Dairy website. This approach encouraged discussions on related topics, such as recycling and health, fostering teachers' understanding through active engagement.

Students responded positively to the message that dairy cattle farmers genuinely care about their practices. This messaging helps pre-service teachers develop their opinions about dairy farming and establishes a foundation for the messages they will share with their future students.

### South Dakota – South Dakota State Fair

The South Dakota State Fair is an excellent opportunity to connect with fairgoers and promote dairy. In 2024, an Undeniably Dairy grant funded a mural on the Dakota Marketplace building, home to the Dairy Bar, featuring local cows and nutrient information about milk from different breeds.

The Undeniably Dairy logo is prominently displayed, and the mural shows cows grazing with a barn in the background, highlighting the dairy industry's community impact. As a permanent installation on the Open Class Dairy Barn wall, it will engage visitors consistently, reminding them of the origins of their milk. The fair attracts about 200,000 attendees over five days, making this mural a vital link between consumers and agriculture.

## Milking success: The impact of the Adopt a Cow Program in 2024

During the 2024 back-to-school season, Midwest Dairy again partnered with the Adopt a Cow program to bring dairy's story to students across the 10-state region. This free program connects dairy farmers with educators to help students learn where their food comes from. Students track the growth of a calf throughout the school year while engaging in lessons and activities. Though primarily designed for classrooms, the program has also reached Boys & Girls Clubs, libraries, daycares, senior living centers, and more.

Midwest Dairy had six farm hosts supporting the program this year: Berning Dairy from Illinois, College of the Ozarks from Missouri, JCC Jerseys from Nebraska, Miron Farm from Minnesota, Rottinghaus Holstein Farm from Kansas, and Takes Dairy from Iowa. Their engaging storytelling through photos, narratives, and live calf chats contributed significantly to the program's success.

In 2024, Midwest Dairy supported over 4,100 educators from the 10-state area, reaching approximately 110,400 students. A new app was launched to manage the program, enabling engagement tracking for the first time. We found that 84% of the educators actively used the program. Survey data also showed a 20% increase in trust regarding dairy's environmental impact and animal care compared to the previous year.

A teacher from Gurnee, Illinois, shared "I used resources from the Adopt a Cow program to teach students during science. Students were excited to receive updates about our cow Anna Sue and they also learned so much about dairy and where it comes from."

The program features several exciting contests throughout the year, including the "Most Kissable Calf" competition in February. Over 1 million votes were cast, and Midwest Dairy's very own calf, Diamond, from Rottinghaus Holstein Farm in Kansas, was crowned the "Most Kissable Calf." A total of 15 calves participated, including those from the Midwest region.

This is the first year that entire grade levels adopted calves, increasing engagement in school. Social media engagement has also increased, with educators sharing their experiences with their followers. Many are looking forward to the live calf chats scheduled for this spring, where students will have the opportunity to meet our farmers and ask questions.

## Supporting dairy among diverse dietitians

Midwest Dairy collaborated with Dairy Max, United Dairy of Michigan, American Dairy Association, Indiana, and the National Dairy Council to host “A Taste of Tradition,” an event to build trust in dairy among over 40 diverse and influential thought leaders.

Every year, thousands of dietitians across the U.S. attend the annual Food and Nutrition Conference and Expo (FNCE) to earn continuing education credits and stay informed about the newest research and food innovations. This year’s conference was hosted in Minneapolis in early October.

Building trust with health and wellness thought leaders who make dietary recommendations for families is important, as they play a key role in educating consumers about the importance of dairy’s sustainable nutrition. On average, dairy is consumed less in diverse populations, which may be attributed to factors such as limited awareness of dairy’s nutritional benefits, cultural cuisine that excludes dairy, and a higher prevalence of lactose intolerance. To address these challenges, attendees invited to the FNCE included influential thought leader members of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics member interest groups: Latinos and Hispanics in Dietetics and Nutrition (LAHIDAN), National Organization of Blacks in Dietetics and Nutrition (NOBIDAN) and Diversify Dietetics.

Attendees first heard from nationally recognized bilingual and multicultural dietitian Marina Chaparro, RD, CDE, MPH, who spoke about the importance of dairy in Hispanic populations as a celebration of the culture and for key nutrients during the first 1,000 days of life. Following Marina, attendees enjoyed a meal celebrating National Hispanic Heritage Month, which included the opportunity to make their own handmade tortillas. Next, Gayle Shipp, PhD, RDN, CLS, a community-based researcher and Assistant Professor at Michigan State University, spoke about health disparities that uniquely impact African Americans and how dairy is a critical source of nutrition throughout various life-stages, including the first 1,000 days of life.

To conclude the evening’s presentations, dairy farmer Margaret Johnson shared her experience as a farmer and Certified Crop Advisor. She also explained how her family celebrates Hispanic traditions with her farm staff, who are of Mexican heritage. Additionally, Margaret highlighted their commitment to caring for their animals and the planet through several sustainable farming practices. Throughout the year, we have been asking thought leader audiences to evaluate the dairy industry’s performance regarding environmental responsibility. Our research indicates that consumers are concerned about environmental sustainability, and thought leaders play a significant role in shaping consumer opinions. In a pre-event survey, only 55% of attendees rated the dairy industry positively. However, post-event feedback demonstrated a remarkable 38% increase in positive ratings, with 93% of attendees viewing dairy positively.

## Growing trust through campus engagements

College campuses are home to many Generation Z (Gen Z) students, who research shows are the least trusting consumer segment. Positive perceptions of dairy can drive sales, making campuses an ideal place to connect with Gen Z shoppers. Through university partnerships, Midwest Dairy shares dairy’s farm-to-table story, emphasizing messages about sustainable nutrition. This

approach promotes dairy products and also sparks meaningful conversations about the dairy industry while offering fun and engaging experiences for college students.

## University of Nebraska-Lincoln

To kick off the school year, Midwest Dairy staff, dairy farmers, and ambassadors interacted with students and Nebraska Husker fans through a dairy game, trivia spin wheel, and trivia cards at different events at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. The partnership between Husker Athletics and Midwest Dairy continues to offer multiple events to build trust in dairy with Gen Z and other audiences.

Husker Mania is part of Big Red Welcome, an event that welcomes students back to campus. Organized by the campus recreation center, it introduces students to intramural sports and activities. Midwest Dairy set up a table featuring a life-size game called Undeniably Dairy's Dairy Dash, where students acted as a dairy cow and farmer, completing challenges that illustrated how dairy farmers care for their cows. About 1,800 students attended, with lines forming all night to engage with the game and learn about the dairy industry, aided by Dairy Ambassadors for peer interaction.

Another Big Red Welcome event that Midwest Dairy participated in was Wellness Fest. This was held outside the City Campus Union, where students came to participate in goat yoga, ride the smoothie bike, and learn about other services available to keep them healthy throughout the school year. Midwest Dairy used the spin wheel game to test students' dairy knowledge and teach them about where their favorite dairy products come from.

A fan fest called Bash at the Bob was held before Nebraska's first home volleyball game at the Bob Devaney Sports Center. The event featured face painting, inflatables, and games like "Feed the Dairy Cow" and "Milk the Cow," helping fans learn about cow care and milk collection. Midwest Dairy also engaged Gen Z at a tailgate before Nebraska's first football game, with the Undeniably Dairy Dash game and a trivia spin wheel to test dairy knowledge. They sponsored a Husker volleyball match on September 5, where dairy farmers handed out swag and pizza, asked trivia questions, and shared farm insights. Dairy facts were displayed during the game, and prizes, including t-shirts, were given to winners and the crowd.

## Iowa State University

At Iowa State University (ISU), Midwest Dairy formed a valuable partnership with sustainability thought leaders and Gen Z students from the Live Green! organization, led by their advisor, Merry Rankin. Together, we brought dairy messaging to life at their annual Earth Day event, demonstrating our shared commitment to sustainability and the environment. The event was a testament to the power of collaboration, offering diverse Earth-minded engagement opportunities, sustainability-focused giveaways, free bike tune-ups, and music.

Over 500 students, faculty, and staff participated in this year's Earth Day campus celebration. Midwest Dairy also collaborated with the Dairy Science Club on campus to bring dairy sustainability messaging to the event. The Dairy Science Club engaged with their peers and had meaningful discussions about dairy sustainability and animal care with attendees. Through this

partnership, Midwest Dairy reached participants at the event and those who interacted with the partner's social media platforms before, during, and after the event.

## University of Illinois

The University of Illinois celebrated Earth Day by highlighting dairy sustainability. Midwest Dairy partnered with the Illini Dairy Club to increase awareness of dairy sustainability practices during the University of Illinois' Sustainapalooza event. Sustainapalooza was held on Earth Day in April on the main quad outside the Illini Union. This central location captured the attention of over 4,000 University of Illinois students who attended the event, which featured food, live music, an art show, a clothing swap, vendors, and tabling. The Illini Union Board and Students for Environmental Concerns sponsored the event at the University of Illinois.

The Illini Dairy Club, with support from Midwest Dairy, had a tent, banners, and posters featuring the message "Life without dairy is unsustainable, so we're making dairy more sustainable." The club engaged with students through PLINKO, where students were asked dairy sustainability trivia questions. Students who participated in trivia received a canvas reusable bag with dairy sustainability messaging. Over 200 bags were handed out to students on campus.

The event's success has sparked discussions between Midwest Dairy and the Illini Dairy Club about future collaborations. We are exploring ways to reach more students in the Fall and continue to aim to increase awareness of dairy farmers' commitment to sustainability. This partnership fosters peer-to-peer interaction among Gen Z and underscores our shared goal of promoting dairy sustainability to all!

## Wichita State University

For the second year, Midwest Dairy partnered with Wichita State University's College of Innovation and Design's Applied Sustainability in Innovation course on a fall project. The course project provided a real-world challenge for students to research and offer possible solutions to stakeholders. The students were tasked with researching sustainable and efficient bedding strategies for smaller dairy farms.

The semester-long project began with an introduction to the challenge and a conversation through Zoom with a dairy farmer, Dave Lane of Goddard, Kansas. As part of their research, students toured Lane's farm to learn more about dairy farming and dairy's sustainability efforts. The tour was a valuable learning opportunity to help students understand manure management on the farm and much more.

Students developed a problem statement for the challenge. For example, group one's problem statement was "How might we better manage manure for small dairy farms so that they can spend less money on bedding material?" and group two's problem statement was "How might we efficiently collect manure for the use of bedding so it can be reused?" Students worked the entire semester investigating several aspects to address their statements and meet the challenge. They used the Business Model Canvas for Sustainability and sustainability assessments such as the Life Cycle Analysis, Life Cycle Costing, and Social-Life Cycle Analysis

tools to assist with their recommendations. Most of the students in the class were environmental engineering majors.

Students presented their proposals and specific recommendations to stakeholders in early December 2023, including dairy farmer Dave Lane and Midwest Dairy staff Ron Grusenmeyer and Robyn Stuewe.

## South Dakota State University

New in 2024, the annual Dairy Dash moved to South Dakota State University (SDSU). The Dairy Dash is a partnership between Midwest Dairy and the Miller Wellness Center to build trust in dairy amongst college-aged students and families. The 5K race occurred on the morning of September 7, the same day as the SDSU Dairy Drive football game. Following the race, the kids' "Moo Mile" fun run took place for children ages 2-10. All proceeds from the Dairy Dash went to Jack's Cupboard, the on-campus food pantry at SDSU, to supply dairy products throughout the year to students facing food insecurity.

Runners were encouraged to post milk mustache photos, led by the SDSU Dairy Ambassadors, and sample various dairy products donated by partners. Kids were also invited to participate in an ice cream painting craft with the SDSU Dairy Science Club. Signage throughout the race featured messages about dairy nutrition, sustainability, and cow comfort on the farm.

Midwest Dairy worked with several SDSU student leaders to promote the race to college students and several local influencers. Race information was shared with over 83,000 online followers, and influencers were given discount codes to encourage registration. One of the influencers helped Midwest Dairy promote the event on Dakota News Now.

Later that evening, Midwest Dairy once again partnered with SDSU Athletics through the SDSU Dairy Drive football game. This partnership reaches consumers but also brings the dairy community together, including local processors such as Valley Queen, Agropur, Bel Brands, AMPI, and Prairie Farms, who all actively participate in the tailgate of the fall football game.

As part of this partnership, SDSU Athletics promoted the Dairy Dash race on its social media channels, reaching 44,000 online followers. SDSU student track and cross-country athlete Claire Beckman promoted the Dairy Dash race and shared how she uses dairy to fuel her training during a radio interview that aired at halftime of a football game the weekend before the Dairy Drive game.

Lastly, members of the dairy community, including partners and SDSU faculty, were recognized on the field during halftime to put a face to the dairy industry. The SDSU Jackrabbits defeated Incarnate Word 45-24 during a sold-out game with an attendance of 19,321, including 4,128 students.

## University of Minnesota

Midwest Dairy kicked off its 2024 partnership with the University of Minnesota at the annual Goldy's Run, featuring a 5K and a 10-mile race. The event began outside Huntington Bank Stadium and finished inside the stadium. Engaging college campuses is essential for building

trust with adult Gen Z consumers, and Goldy's Run successfully attracted those interested in fitness and nutrition—more than 5,500 participants registered for the race, many supported by family and spectators.

Despite chilly temperatures and morning rain, hundreds of runners visited Midwest Dairy's Undeniably Dairy booth to play Plinko and learn about cow care. Dairy trivia sparked meaningful discussions about cow comfort, a priority for adult Gen Z. The booth showcased designs from the #TeamMilk campaign supported by MilkPep and Dairy Management Inc. Runners and supporters dried off with "You're Gonna Need Milk for That" towels and cheered with cowbells.

Midwest Dairy also partnered with the University of Minnesota to promote sustainability, cow care, and nutrition awareness at a Fan Fest in late September. The event, held in front of Huntington Bank Stadium, featured games, giveaways, and a trivia game with a Plinko board. A sudden rainstorm increased the demand for "Gonna Need Milk for That" drying towels, and the Undeniably Dairy tent engaged with around 600 consumers looking for a dry space. During the game, messages about dairy sustainability were shown on the big screen, reaching over 52,000 fans and marking one of the largest crowds in the stadium's history.

## Kansas State University

In 2024, Midwest Dairy identified an opportunity to partner with the Kansas State University (K-State) Esports Club. The partnership sought to engage adult Gen Z video gamers and build trust in dairy. As a land-grant university, K-State has a strong agricultural focus. However, collaborating with the growing K-State Esports Club offers a chance to reach an unexpected audience as it gains visibility on campus and in the competitive and community gaming arenas. Esports also reach a high school audience, as prospective students explore the university during campus visits or participate in tournaments.

K-State Esports is developing creative ways to highlight dairy products to its social media followers. In 2024, the varsity team wore cow-print jerseys and started discussions online about students' favorite dairy snacks or drinks. The best ways to follow along with the K-State Esports program are Instagram, X, or Twitch.

Dairy remained relevant on campus as Midwest Dairy's partnership with the K-State Bakery Science Club flourished for the second year. Since the fall 2023 philanthropy event, Midwest Dairy stayed connected with the student organization, looking for opportunities to collaborate and support both organizations' goals.

The Bake Club seeks to raise its campus profile and boost participation in its bi-weekly meetings. Membership is free and open to all students, regardless of whether they are enrolled in Grain Science or related programs. The club has expressed a desire to incorporate more baking with butter and other dairy ingredients throughout the semester. However, cost considerations make this challenging at times. To support the Bake Club's priorities, Midwest Dairy partnered with them to host a dairy-themed meeting.

K-State women's basketball player and #FueledxDairy influencer Ayoka Lee joined Bake Club for a special evening of creating ice cream sandwiches. Before the event, she met with club officers and filmed an Instagram Reel to share afterward. Lee encouraged students to get involved with

Bake Club. The evening concluded with a fun game of dairy trivia featuring questions about dairy ingredients, nutrition, and farming practices, drawing 22 attendees. The social media promotion by Lee and Bake Club generated over 11,300 impressions.

## Northern Illinois University

In October, Bryan Flower, Assistant Director for Food Systems Innovation at Northern Illinois University (NIU), featured Illinois dairy farmer Andy Lenkaitis of Lenkaitis Holsteins on his podcast, Innovation Conversation, to discuss robotics in dairy farming and its impact on the food system. This podcast, presented by NIU and the Office of Innovation, engages listeners in discussions with leading experts on food systems and sustainability. The episode explored how robotics and other innovations are being adopted on dairy farms across the U.S. [Click here to listen to the podcast episode.](#)

Following the podcast, Flower collaborated with Dr. Courtney Gallaher, Director of Campus Sustainability, to present to more than 100 attendees at the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education Conference 2024 in Anaheim, California. Their presentation, “Regionalizing the Food System While Achieving Campus Sustainability Goals: NIU’s Edible Campus Program,” showcased the program’s impact on campus sustainability initiatives, emphasizing dairy’s role in supporting a sustainable food system.

During an October fundraiser for the Edible Campus program, Flower discussed the dairy industry’s commitment to sustainability, highlighting the support that Midwest Dairy provides to the Edible Campus Meal Prep Program (ECMPP). Attendees received basil bookmarks and discussed cow pots, which were included in the latest support for the ECMPP to help start seedlings for the Edible Campus garden.

## Empowering dairy's story through collaboration with thought leaders

Midwest Dairy collaborates with thought leaders who attend events and conferences, participate in panels, and give interviews to share their expertise on the benefits of dairy. By engaging with thought leaders at events, we build new connections across diverse industries, broaden their dairy knowledge, and reach new subject matter experts. Thought leaders are influential experts who play a pivotal role in shaping opinions. Through events, Midwest Dairy aims to enhance the positive perception of dairy, as their voices lend credibility to our message about its role in sustainable food systems. They also help build a network of other influential thought leaders who can amplify the dairy industry. Continue reading to discover how Midwest Dairy utilized these remarkable thought leaders in the marketplace.

### From Grass to Glass

In 2024, Midwest Dairy hosted "From Grass to Glass: Essential Conversations for a Sustainable Food System" in Chicago. This event brought together sustainability thought leaders from our 10-state region, allowing attendees to learn about dairy's sustainability commitments from speakers, including farmers Sarah Lenkaitis and Scott Brenner, as well as experts such as Gregg Sanford, Ph.D., and Chef Dietitian Eric Meredith.

CEO Corey Scott gave opening remarks followed by an interactive presentation by Lenkaitis, who shared her family farm story and innovative practices. The following day featured sessions on soil health, water conservation, and efforts to mitigate methane emissions. Attendees also networked and discussed future collaborations throughout the event.

Before the event, only 50% of attendees perceived dairy sustainability positively, but 100% reported a positive perception afterward.

### Alliance for the Future of Agriculture

Midwest Dairy partnered with the Alliance for the Future of Agriculture (AFAN) in Nebraska to host a dairy crawl in Lincoln, fostering trust in dairy and promoting sustainability. The event was attended by 26 environmental leaders from organizations such as Keep Nebraska Beautiful and the City of Lincoln's sustainability department, as well as local dairy farmers.

The crawl included three stops: Zipline Tap & Grill, Toast, and 402 Creamery. It began with networking and a nacho bar, where Darren Mueller of Prairieland Dairy shared innovations in milking and composting. At Toast, attendees enjoyed a dairy-infused entrée while Professor Paul Kononoff discussed advancements in dairy farming over the past 50 years. The evening concluded at 402 Creamery with ice cream and insights from dairy farmers Ann Engleman and her granddaughter Alli, highlighting sustainability from a family perspective.

Overall, the event sparked meaningful conversations and strengthened relationships, paving the way for future collaborations in the dairy industry.

## World Food Prize Reception

Midwest Dairy was invited to the World Food Prize Reception, hosted by America's Cultivation Corridor during the Norman E. Borlaug International Dialogue. The event brought together more than 120 industry leaders from agriculture, biosciences, and academia to celebrate Iowa's innovations and explore sustainable agricultural practices.

Key speakers highlighted Iowa's emergence as a hub for agricultural and bioscience innovation, emphasizing the importance of cross-industry partnerships in advancing sustainable food production. Iowa dairy farmers Lee Maassen and Robert Horst joined Midwest Dairy staff to discuss dairy's role in sustainable food systems. Interns from the Next Gen Innovation Impact Study Interns also shared insights from their experiences.

The collaboration allowed Midwest Dairy to connect with leaders across the sustainable food system, showcasing dairy's essential role in nutrition and environmental stewardship.

## “Nourishing a Sustainable Food System: Dairy’s Role” event

Midwest Dairy hosted two dinner events titled “Nourishing a Sustainable Food System: Dairy’s Role,” designed to build trust in dairy sustainability and foster connections with thought leaders. The Chicago event took place on October 16 at Herban Produce, and the Bloomington event followed on October 23 at Epiphany Farms Restaurant, both featuring a farm-to-table experience. The events connected Midwest Dairy with 33 thought leaders in the sustainable food sector, receiving positive feedback on dairy's role in sustainability.

The evenings began with Icebreaker Bingo, where guests mingled and enjoyed appetizers accompanied by prizes from Undeniably Dairy. Each event featured three presenters, each focusing on a unique aspect of dairy’s role in sustainability. Dr. Stephanie Masiello Schuette from Dairy Management Inc. discussed the foundational role of dairy in a sustainable food system. Lorilee Schultz from Mil-R-Mor in Orangeville, Illinois, and Beth Marcoot from Marcoot Jersey Farm and Creamery in Greenville, Illinois, shared insights as local dairy farmers. Jillian Quainoo, RDN, from WellnessJill.com, highlighted the nutritional, economic, and social contributions of dairy.

To facilitate discussions, a Master of Ceremony was appointed for each event. Dakota Cowger, a dairy farmer from Bettenhausen Farm, led the Chicago event, while Dr. Derek Nolan, a Dairy Extension Specialist at the University of Illinois, guided the Bloomington event.

Guests enjoyed meals featuring local dairy ingredients and were given cheese and fudge boxes from Marcoot Jersey Farm and Creamery as a gift. Chicago attendees also received fresh veggies from Herban Produce.

## May AI Climate Institute Annual Review meeting

Following a May meeting with Executive Director Shawn Haag, Midwest Dairy attended the AI Climate Institute's Annual Review meeting at the St. Paul Campus.

During the meeting, Midwest Dairy discussed dairy's sustainability goals and initiatives through one-on-one conversations and interactive breakout sessions with a diverse group of scientists and engineers involved in a five-year grant project.

The AI Climate Institute is one of seven National AI Research Institutes, a collaborative effort led by the University of Minnesota, along with Colorado State University, Cornell University, Delaware State University, North Carolina State University, and Purdue University. This initiative combines agriculture and forestry science with AI innovation to address climate change while also supporting rural economies.

The meeting helped Midwest Dairy build relationships and spark interest in future collaboration, including connecting researchers with farmers to better understand their challenges and needs.

### Sustainability luncheon discussion

In late November, Midwest Dairy hosted a luncheon discussion in Wichita, Kansas, bringing together thought leaders in food systems and environmental sustainability. The event highlighted the crucial role that dairy plays in establishing a sustainable food system. It provides a unique opportunity to explore the intersection of agriculture, sustainability, and health, emphasizing the integral role of dairy within the broader food system.

Kansas dairy farmers Orville Miller and Heidi Wells shared insights into their farming practices. Miller emphasized the forages and by-products that comprise a dairy cow's diet, explaining how these by-products are utilized and how cows help reduce waste sent to landfills. Wells, a registered dietitian and school foodservice director, also emphasized the nutritional benefits of dairy, highlighting its essential role in promoting overall health.

Local community experts also contributed to the discussion. Maggie Schoonover, Director of Sustainable Innovation and Assistant Educator at Wichita State University's College of Innovation and Design, along with Matt Unruh, Assistant Director at the Kansas Water Office, provided valuable insights.

## Science meets agriculture as checkoff leverages dairy in the classroom

Midwest Dairy focuses on Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) education, aiming to include dairy in school curricula. STEM is an educational approach that combines science, technology, engineering, and math to foster critical thinking and innovation. Over the next decade, the checkoff program aims to help students engage in discussions and understand scientific concepts related to dairy farming. In 2024, Dairy Checkoff published several new resources for high school science teachers, including life science curriculum units and assessments, all aligned with Next Gen Science Standards and available for free to educators. Keep reading to see how the STEM curriculum is being utilized across the 10-state region.

### Illinois

Midwest Dairy partnered with the Illinois Agricultural Biology Curriculum Development Team (IABCDT) in 2024 to integrate dairy and agriculture into high school science classes, strengthening the perception of the dairy industry and its environmental sustainability role.

IABCDT included dairy in two of the six storylines they developed. The Milk Storyline explores the makeup of milk, dairy products, and cultural uses of dairy. A training for pilot teachers was scheduled for February 2025. The Animal Nutrition Storyline focuses on ruminant nutrition, specifically cows, with an assessment of how farm animals use matter and energy. Fifteen pilot teachers have been trained for this storyline.

Midwest Dairy produced six videos for both storylines, covering topics like Milk Across the Species, Animal Diet Designers, Lactose Intolerance, Future of Dairy Technology, and Cow Comfort Chronicles. To ensure the videos were effective, Midwest Dairy partnered with various stakeholders, including Illinois dairy farms and nutrition experts.

### Iowa

In summer 2024, STEM educators across Iowa explored agriculture through a partnership between Midwest Dairy and the Iowa Agriculture Literacy Foundation (IALF).

More than 200 educators participated in workshops held in eight Iowa communities. Each event involved a hands-on exploration of Iowa agriculture, including visits to local farms and agricultural businesses, in-depth discussions with agriculture experts, and interactive classroom activities to help students make real-world connections.

Teachers explored various agricultural topics, from crop farming to livestock production. They toured an Iowa dairy farm and learned about the production process and sustainability practices from local industry professionals. Workshops also included hands-on STEM activities that brought science to life. Educators reviewed Midwest Dairy STEM resources aligned with next-generation science standards and local topics. Each teacher made mozzarella cheese while learning about the science behind the cheese-making process.

## Kansas

In late June, Midwest Dairy partnered with Smoky Hill Education Service Center to provide a professional learning opportunity for middle and high school science and career and technical education teachers in Salina, Kansas. This event helped educators deepen their understanding of the Next Generation Science Standards. Participants engaged in hands-on activities from the new STEM units and transfer tasks.

Dairy farmer Melissa Hildebrand Reed shared insights about her operation and walked the group through scientific tests conducted on her farm. Attendees valued the opportunity to learn from her and engage in discussions about dairy farming.

Participants actively discussed how to incorporate the activities into their classes and exchanged ideas with one another. Across the two half-day sessions, participants could earn eight professional development hours or up to three hours of college credit. Attendees appreciated the resources and training, with most saying that they would likely recommend this program to a friend or colleague.

## Minnesota

Midwest Dairy partnered with the Minnesota State Science Teachers Association (MNSTA) in fall 2024 to showcase how food and agriculture concepts can be integrated into science education. This initiative included a webinar, newsletters, listserv updates, and two interactive sessions at the annual conference in St. Cloud. With Minnesota implementing the Next Generation Science Standards this school year, now is the perfect time to provide educators with access to new, free resources and training on STEM units, transfer tasks, and phenomena dairy checkoff developed.

The October webinar “Food Totally Transfers” emphasized the importance of transfer tasks in connecting theoretical knowledge to real-world applications. Nine teachers attended, and the recorded session was shared with all.

Four email updates and two newsletters reached over 1,812 teachers. A vendor table with the Science Museum engaged over 60 attendees, who then participated in a drawing for three resource kits. Additionally, 14 teachers participated in the "Digestion Drama" workshop, acting out milk digestion and discussing ways to incorporate the activity into their classrooms.

Midwest Dairy also hosted a three-hour training session using the Media Mayhem curriculum. Teachers acted as students to explore media claims about the dairy industry's environmental impact. Afterward, they toured a farm with NexGen Dairy, which provided insights on sustainability practices and animal care, having prepared with the lesson unit beforehand.

## Missouri

This fall, Midwest Dairy partnered with Erin Snelling, a high school science teacher from Missouri, to present engaging, hands-on STEM activities at two major education conferences in the state. The Interface Conference, organized by the Missouri Department of Education, and the Science Teachers of Missouri (STOM) Conference allowed educators to explore new resources integrating dairy and real-world applications into their curricula.

At the Interface Conference, Snelling led "Whey Protein Can Be Legen 'Dairy", a session designed for high school educators. This session focused on whey protein and its effects on exercise performance. Through interactive activities, participants addressed the question, "Why might someone who exercises consume whey protein?" Teachers left equipped with tools to incorporate this real-world concept into their classrooms.

Later, at the STOM Conference, Snelling presented the "Milk Digestion Science Theater" from dairy checkoff's Post Game Analysis unit. This creative session invited teachers to act as "digestive organs," "enzymes," and "molecules," allowing them to actively participate in simulating the process of milk digestion. In addition to the engaging presentations, Snelling introduced educators to new, free STEM resources from dairy checkoff at both conferences.

## Nebraska

Midwest Dairy participated in a STEM workshop for Lincoln Public Schools (LPS) in late June 2024. The workshop occurred at Pound Middle School in Lincoln, Nebraska, and was attended by 12 science educators, three District Curriculum Specialists, and two student consultants. A seed grant funded this event, supporting an assessment task project with LPS. During the three-day collaboration, participants used dairy-funded tasks available on the Food and Agriculture Center website.

On the second day, Midwest Dairy introduced the dairy-focused STEM resources available to the science educators over a pizza lunch. The presentation emphasized transfer tasks, guiding the group through the "More Cheese, Please" transfer task experiment. Participants tested both 2% milk and lactose-free milk to determine the presence of glucose, which sparked engaging discussions and led into the lactose intolerance section of the task.

The educators expressed excitement about the dairy-focused resources and how they could access them. The sixth-grade team plans to implement the "More Cheese, Please" task, incorporating the workshop's lab activity. The science teachers in attendance will be able to reach approximately 1,200 to 1,500 middle school students across their classes. This partnership will continue to provide support as needed and to monitor the effectiveness of the dairy-centered resources being utilized.

## South Dakota

Midwest Dairy partnered with the South Dakota Science Teaching Association to offer local teachers a virtual professional development opportunity. This program showcased dairy-funded resources for STEM education that align with the Next Generation Science Standards. The training reached 27 high school science teachers and impacted approximately 2,000 students.

Teachers engaged in activities as if they were students, gaining firsthand knowledge and experience using these new resources. This experience aimed to inspire students and enrich curricula with valuable, real-world agricultural phenomena related to dairy production, sustainability, and nutrition. Additionally, participants received ten continuing education credits and a kit of supplies corresponding to one of the curriculum units.

Midwest Dairy partnered with a local teacher and an education consultant to facilitate the training. One teacher remarked, “The learning activities and materials were engaging and left me with ideas I want to incorporate into my classroom.” This partnership has proven valuable in fostering relationships in STEM education in South Dakota while extending the reach and application of the new curriculum units.

# Sales

## Driving dairy sales during Back-to-School season

During the back-to-school season in August and September, Midwest Dairy partnered with several vendors to execute a multi-channel marketing strategy designed to increase demand for dairy products among the region's top five retail partners. Midwest Dairy understands the importance of top-of-mind for consumers, encouraging them to include dairy in their shopping carts and purchase additional dairy products by utilizing recipes. The highlighted products during this campaign included milk, cheese, yogurt, and butter. All participating vendors utilized cohesive, creative promotional elements, enabling consumers to easily recognize the campaign, whether shopping in-store, online, or browsing the web for new recipes. Learn more about these vendors and see the campaign results below!

**Chicory**, a third-party vendor, boosts product sales and usage through digital recipe inspiration. With 91% of shoppers regularly using online recipes, Chicory placed ads targeting keywords, recipe categories, and usage occasions. When consumers clicked on the ad to “shop milk (cheese, yogurt),” they were redirected to Instacart, where they could add ingredients to their online shopping cart. The campaign delivered 9 million impressions, generating over 12,000 clicks on ads with a click-through rate of 0.14%.

**Neptune is** also a third-party vendor that supports in-store signage for retailers across Midwest Dairy's region. Data shows that 86% of grocery trips occur in physical stores, and 46% of in-store shoppers are inspired by displays and signs. During the back-to-school campaign, we featured back-to-school signs with top accounts by volume: Hy-Vee, Kroger, Jewel-Osco, Schnucks, and Cub Foods. Neptune also achieved 13 million impressions across online channels.

**Instacart is** an online service that connects customers with shoppers to deliver groceries from local retailers. Their ads received 3.2 million impressions and a \$6.52 return on ad spend. Over 192,000 units of dairy products were sold.

Due to inflationary pressures, consumers are more likely to shop for groceries in value outlets such as Walmart and Dollar General. Therefore, the impact of sales for the entire Midwest Dairy region, including these outlets, resulted in 8 million incremental pounds of milk from August to September.

## Freddy's Frozen Custard proves a successful partnership in 2024

Midwest Dairy focuses on developing partnerships with foodservice operators in our 10-state region to drive dairy sales through menu innovation, limited-time offers (LTO), and other opportunities. One key partner is Freddy's Frozen Custard and Steakburgers (Freddy's).

Freddy's, headquartered in Wichita, Kansas, has 538 franchise locations nationwide. From August 21 to October 22, these locations participated in a special LTO. The promotion featured the Freddy's Grilled Cheese Steakburger, which includes four slices of cheese. Freddy's also introduced three limited-time dairy-based desserts: a pumpkin pie concrete, a pumpkin pie shake, and a new apple pie concrete. This partnership included marketing support for a multi-channel campaign to promote the dairy-based offerings through in-store point-of-sale displays, yard signs, menu boards, social media, a website, and email.

Midwest Dairy is excited to report that the 2024 campaign drove additional incremental sales, surpassing the impressive results of 2023. The fan-favorite Grilled Cheese Steakburger made a successful return, exceeding sales targets! Additionally, the LTO concrete and shakes led sales, becoming the top sellers at Freddy's. Overall, the campaign resulted in 5.8 million pounds of dairy sold and 500,000 incremental pounds of milk on top of a very successful 2023 campaign.

Midwest Dairy had the opportunity to feature this partnership on a recent episode of Your Dairy Checkoff podcast. You can learn more [here](#).

Midwest Dairy and Freddy's Frozen Custard, and Steakburgers look forward to exploring partnership opportunities to continue driving dairy sales in the year ahead.

## Maximize the holiday season grocery shopping with Instacart

During the holiday season in November and December, Midwest Dairy partnered with Chicory and Instacart to implement a multi-channel marketing strategy to increase demand for dairy products across the 10-state region. Midwest Dairy collaborates with partners to keep dairy products prominent on shoppers' grocery lists and encourages them to integrate dairy into new recipes. The campaign highlighted products such as milk, sour cream, butter, cream, cheese, and yogurt. Both vendors utilized cohesive materials, making the campaign recognizable to consumers while shopping online or seeking recipes.

Chicory, a third-party vendor, drives sales through digital recipe inspiration. Currently, 91% of shoppers regularly use online recipes. These shoppers see product ads when searching by keywords, exploring recipe categories, or looking for specific usage occasions. When they click on an ad to "shop for butter, cheese, or yogurt," they are redirected to Instacart to add these ingredients to their online shopping cart. These campaigns collectively generated over 45 million incremental pounds of milk in the Midwest Dairy Region, with milk, lactose-free milk, and cheese being the top performers.

Holidays drive considerable dairy consumption, with retailers reporting a 50% increase or more in online grocery shopping. During the holiday season, there is often a noticeable increase in recipe searches, which can rise by 30% or more, prompting consumers to seek out ingredients that lead to additional grocery purchases. The positive results from these campaigns demonstrate the importance of engaging in digital tactics to drive incremental dairy sales. These campaigns engaged consumers at various stages of their shopping journey to enhance dairy sales through recipes and shoppable dairy content ads on digital devices.

## Checkoff partners celebrate June Dairy Month

June is Dairy Month, a national celebration widely supported by many Midwest Dairy retail partners. It is a great time to promote dairy products in the grocery store through special deals and campaigns, highlighting how farmers responsibly and sustainably produce them. In 2024, Midwest Dairy's grocery partners celebrated and showcased the Midwest dairy farmer.

### Hy-Vee

Midwest Dairy partnered with Hy-Vee Inc. to create a chain-wide celebration of June Dairy Month. Hy-Vee is a retailer based in West Des Moines, Iowa, and operates 304 grocery stores across eight Midwestern states, including Illinois, Nebraska, Minnesota, Missouri, Kansas, and South Dakota. The "Greetings from Dairy" campaign promoted sustainable dairy production and unique dairy recipes. Featured recipes included Strawberry Cottage Cheese Ice Cream, Bacon Bruschetta Dip, and Southwest Avocado Sliders.

The campaign featured in-store displays of dairy products at over 179 locations, aisle blades with QR codes that linked to recipes, and a video on dairy farm sustainability. It also included targeted e-commerce banners with a "Shop Now" feature, two weekly print advertisements, a social media post showcasing Midwest Dairy's sustainability video, and in-store events featuring the Iowa Dairy Princess and Dairy Ambassadors.

The e-commerce banners reached over one million viewers, and shopper conversions netted 24,068 basket purchases from click-throughs. Facebook posts also reached over half a million viewers. Overall, this June Dairy Month campaign generated 290,000 incremental pounds of milk.

### Fareway

Fareway teamed up with Midwest Dairy to "Share the Love of Dairy" and celebrate June Dairy Month. Headquartered in Boone, Iowa, Fareway operates 131 stores across seven Midwestern states: Iowa, Illinois, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, and South Dakota. To boost dairy sales, Fareway launched a multi-channel campaign focusing on high-growth categories, including cheese, yogurt, and cottage cheese.

Fareway collaborated with 35 local Hummingbird influencers to capture the attention of Gen Z shoppers, showcasing how dairy seamlessly fits into their daily meals. Hummingbirds is a social media platform that recruits local consumers to share experiences with brands, recipes, and shopping. These influencers reach thousands of local consumers, impacting their shopping behaviors and driving results. The website users are 90% women, 75% between ages 24-45, and 50% are parents. This Dairy Month campaign generated over 10,000 views. As part of the campaign, Fareway selected a vendor sponsor to support the initiative with exclusive sales promotions that highlight the love of dairy. Fareway dietitians hosted a virtual cooking class in early June, teaching 85 participants to make Cheesy California and Italian Grinder Wraps. Attendees also watched a "Community That Cares" video, spotlighting local family farmers who sustainably produce dairy.

These efforts promoted healthy eating and reinforced community support. The campaign featured targeted email, homepage, and in-store monitor ads, complemented by social media content, recipes, and giveaways on Facebook and Instagram. This multi-channel campaign reached an impressive 400,000 consumers and drove over 410,000 incremental pounds of milk, reinforcing dairy's vital role as a dietary staple.

## Jewel-Osco

Midwest Dairy partnered with Chicago-based retailer Jewel-Osco on an omnichannel campaign. An omnichannel strategy integrates all of a brand's channels to create a consistent customer experience across all touchpoints. Jewel incentivized stores to create dairy displays to promote its "buy \$25 in dairy products and receive \$5 off" promotion throughout June at Jewel's 188 stores across Illinois and Iowa.

In addition to in-store displays, Jewel promoted June Dairy Month through its weekly circular ad, posts on Instagram and Facebook, and billboards. The billboards ran in 30 locations across Chicagoland, garnering over 2.5 million impressions in four weeks. New in 2024, Midwest Dairy also partnered with Jewel-Osco's parent company, Albertsons, and its retail media division to promote Dairy Month through online display ads. These display ads appeared on Jewel's e-commerce website and on websites across the internet to drive traffic to Jewelosco.com. Campaign highlights included over three million impressions and a return on ad spend of \$52.43. This means for every dollar spent on the campaign, we drove \$52.43 in dairy sales. Over two million incremental pounds of milk were sold from this omnichannel campaign.

## Coborn's

Coborn's, a retailer in St. Cloud, Minnesota, partnered with Midwest Dairy to celebrate June Dairy Month. Together, they produced the "Welcome Home to Dairy" campaign featuring interviews with local Minnesota dairy farm farmers. Three generations of the Kerfeld Hill-View Farm family were featured in an interview. Family matriarch Rosie Kerfeld was joined by her daughter-in-law, Carrie Kerfeld, and grandson, Nate Kerfeld. They discussed new sustainable dairy practices, such as robotic milking and cover crops, to preserve their farm for future generations. Coborn's extended the month-long celebration through weekly online email and print ads, Facebook and Instagram social media posts, in-store scannable signage linking to dairy recipes, gas pump, and TV announcements, and a June Dairy Month segment on Twin Cities Live featuring Princess Kay.

This campaign reached over 471,000 consumers through social and online engagement. However, due to economic headwinds, the campaign did not achieve the targeted incremental pounds of milk sales.

## Dierbergs Markets

Dierbergs Markets and Midwest Dairy collaborated during Dairy Month to promote sales through their rewards app. Dierbergs Markets is based of St. Louis, Missouri, and has 26 locations in Missouri and Illinois.

Midwest Dairy supported a promotional campaign at Dierbergs, offering 5x points on select dairy products during the first week of June. The campaign also featured three consecutive weeks of

bonus points for purchasing cheese, yogurt, and milk. The promotional campaign was shared weekly on Facebook and Instagram, through targeted emails, in the Dierbergs app, and in the digital weekly ad. Dierbergs included dairy messaging each week, along with digital offers. As a result of this campaign, over 65,000 incremental pounds of milk were sold.

## Midwest Dairy capitalizes on cheesy partnerships

Pizza is a beloved staple enjoyed by people of all ages and backgrounds, making it a key area of focus for Midwest Dairy. Midwest Dairy has achieved success by collaborating with partners in the pizza industry. Research indicates that American families have a strong fondness for pizza, which ranks among the top five most-ordered menu items. Approximately a quarter of Americans consume pizza at least twice a week, and pizza restaurants use more cheese than any other type of food establishment. With this dedicated audience, Midwest Dairy can drive even more dairy sales through menu innovation with our pizza partnerships.

### Marco's Pizza

In 2024, Midwest Dairy partnered with Marco's Pizza to bring dairy innovation to consumers. Marco's Pizza is one of America's fastest-growing pizza brands, particularly among Gen Z. With 1,222 stores across 35 states, the chain is recognized for its handmade dough, fresh cheeses, and Italian-American cuisine.

In response to customer demand for new flavors, Marco's teamed up with Midwest Dairy to develop Carolina Reaper Cheese—a much-anticipated spicy flavor that was previously missing from their menu. This initiative aimed to attract new customers and boost sales. We addressed customer demand by introducing new menu items featuring the limited-time Fiery Flavors Spicy Cheese. This cheese was available in Marco's Specialty Pizzas, Pizoli, Cheesy Sticks, and Pizza Bowls.

The campaign launched on June 18 and ran until August 4, 2024, focusing on TV and digital ads in key markets for six weeks, along with website promotions and enhanced order platform features. Midwest Dairy and other regional dairy checkoff organizations funded social media and email messaging to boost sales. Fiery Flavors was the second phase of Marco's rebranding campaign, which launched in April with the slogan, "But wait, there's Marco's." The new items were featured on Marco's website and platform until September 2024 before becoming permanent menu staples.

The campaign results indicate that this menu upgrade was successful. Over 93 million emails were sent during the campaign, and paid media delivered over 30 million impressions. Marco's website received over 650,000 clicks for the Fiery Flavors items alone! Some stores reported an overall increase and saw a 2% rise in new customers. The customer return rate exceeded 14.9%, outdoing their typical single-digit benchmark.

Overall, the partnership drove over 2,000,000 incremental pounds of milk.

### Pizza Ranch

In 2022, Midwest Dairy partnered with Pizza Ranch for the second time to enhance its classic appetizer, Cheesy Ranch Stix, by doubling the cheese on this customer favorite. The item was so popular that Pizza Ranch kept this extra-cheesy item on the menu after the promotion. Midwest Dairy partnered with them again in early 2024 to launch Loaded Cheesy Ranch Stix, which allowed Pizza Ranch customers to add other toppings to the Cheesy Ranch Stix.

During a February to April promotion, customers could add up to two toppings and extra cheese to their Cheesy Ranch Stix. Available for takeout and in-store dining, this menu innovation was promoted through digital ads, social media, direct mailers, and email campaigns. Pizza Ranch prominently featured the Undeniably Dairy logo, resulting in nearly 57 million impressions. Nearly 30% of takeout orders included the Cheesy Ranch Stix, increasing cheese usage by nearly 600,000 additional incremental pounds of milk.

Midwest Dairy and Pizza Ranch partnered again at the end of 2024, responding to consumers' demand for value amid a challenging economy. They emphasized affordable prices, high-quality food, and discounts while promoting the use of cheese from local dairy farmers.

To enhance online ordering, Pizza Ranch introduced a special online deal available at 140 locations: two medium single-topping pizzas, a small order of Cheesy Ranch Stix, and a small Cactus Bread for just \$20. This exclusive deal was promoted through digital channels, including Facebook ads, email, and app marketing.

The campaign also featured a social media post featuring an interview with Adam Maassen of Maassen Dairy, near Orange City, Iowa, where Pizza Ranch is headquartered. In the video, Adam discussed his family's fifth-generation dairy farm and its sustainability practices, including cow care. This video reached 26% more people than any other boosted post related to the offer, reaching over 650,000 impressions.

## Godfather's Pizza

Godfather's Pizza, headquartered in Omaha, Nebraska, partnered with Midwest Dairy for a dairy-focused campaign in December. The campaign highlighted one of the key ingredients in Godfather's Pizza—cheese. It featured two themes: one boosting brand awareness and thanking dairy farmers, and the other showcasing the abundance of cheese toppings available on their pizzas and other menu items.

Godfather's Pizza promoted the campaign through emails sent to 50,000 loyalty members, digital creatives displayed on in-store menu boards, and campaign messages included in their traditional advertising schedule. They also utilized social media, their website, and in-app push notifications. Overall, their consumer marketing efforts generated over 1.5 million impressions.

In November, the Larson dairy farm family from Creston, Nebraska, was invited to join the Godfather himself for lunch, and a photo shoot featuring them was included in the campaign. This connected consumers with the people behind the delicious cheese that tops their pizzas. Additionally, Godfather's Pizza customers received 500 extra points for purchases made during this campaign.

Godfather's Pizza tracked the purchase of block cheese that was shredded on-site for their traditional franchisees and monitored the movement of shredded cheese. This campaign resulted in 865,440 incremental pounds of milk sold over Godfather's typical cheese usage.

## Making delicious connections through recipes to drive dairy sales

More than 90% of consumers rely on online recipes and meal inspiration. Additionally, 86% of consumers have been inspired by online recipes to explore new meals, and 80% have purchased new ingredients. Recognizing these trends, Midwest Dairy partners with retailers to create new dairy-inspired recipes that encourage shoppers to purchase dairy products. Continue reading to learn how our partners promote recipes and dairy ingredients to their shoppers.

### Hy-Vee

Midwest Dairy partnered with Hy-Vee to enhance holiday meal planning with a seamless and flavorful experience. Through a strategic email banner and branded landing page, Hy-Vee offered festive, dairy-centric recipes to suit diverse consumer tastes, from indulgent cheeseboards to healthier options.

These recipes include Gluten-Free Goodness, featuring delicious butter-infused dishes; Better-for-You Choices, offering nutritious and flavorful dairy-centric options; and Grazing Cheese Board Ideas, which assist consumers in creating perfect holiday dairy appetizers. During the holidays, the campaign emphasized the importance of cheese and butter, sharing easy recipes for gluten-free, nutritious, and festive appetizers. Integrated into Hy-Vee's online platforms, the campaign effectively engaged consumers.

The results were impressive: 1.9 million consumers received the email, 40% engaged with the content, and 2.4 million incremental pounds of cheese and butter were sold. This collaboration showcased the power of dairy in uniting families around delicious holiday meals, reinforcing its role in festive traditions while driving significant sales and engagement.

### Dierbergs Markets

Midwest Dairy and Dierbergs Markets collaborated on two year-end campaigns in October and November. The October campaign focused on Dierbergs' support of dairy farmers by celebrating National Farmers Day. The November campaign highlighted baking with dairy ahead of Thanksgiving.

Dierbergs proudly supported dairy farm families in October through a dedicated campaign. This initiative featured Illinois dairy farmer Courtney Lintker, who shared her passion for agriculture. The campaign focused on promoting a recipe for Spinach Artichoke Dip. Various other tactics were employed for the National Farmers Day campaign, including bonus points on featured products such as cream cheese, butter, and shredded cheese. Additionally, Midwest Dairy created an Instagram reel on the Dierbergs page, collaborated with influencers for content, including promotions in our weekly ad, and shared digital posts. The campaign also featured a banner on the Dierbergs homepage and included an email blast to our customers.

The November campaign highlighted the tradition of baking during the holiday season. Dierbergs concentrated on engaging shoppers through a "Baking with Dairy" promotion, which included a featured Dutch Apple Cheesecake recipe. This campaign featured a digital ad panel showcasing

bonus points for key ingredients, such as cream cheese and butter. Additionally, the campaign tested TikTok ads, which outperformed Instagram in terms of impressions, reach, and engagement.

## Fareway

Fareway also partnered with Midwest Dairy for the 2024 holiday season to ensure that dairy was at the center of every festive meal. With consumer trends showing a growing demand for value-added milk—such as lactose-free, high-protein, and organic options—this campaign made it easy for shoppers to find and enjoy their favorite dairy staples.

The campaign engaged consumers through digital and in-store activations. Fareway showcased four delicious dairy-filled recipes on social media, encouraging interaction and engagement. Two clickable email banners guided subscribers to exclusive recipes and online shopping. In-store monitors featured recipes and product videos, seen approximately 4 million times. Clickable banners on Fareway's homepage offered direct access to dairy shopping pages with vendor-sponsored promotions.

In December, dairy sales at Fareway soared, proving the effectiveness of this campaign. Nearly every highlighted dairy category experienced increased sales, with value-added products such as milk, butter, cheese, and sour cream emerging as the holiday MVPs. The campaign reached nearly 5 million consumers, resulting in 650,000 incremental pounds of milk sold.

## Schnucks Markets

In November, Midwest Dairy and Schnucks Markets partnered to boost dairy sales through recipes. After analyzing industry data, we determined that the recipes should feature milk, cheese, and/or butter. Three recipes were included in the initiative: Cheese Pastry Straws, Creamy Yogurt Fruit Dip, and Toasted Cheese Tortellini Bites.

As part of the campaign, Schnucks sent an email blast to its subscribers, linking each of the three recipes and promoting a special five times the points on Schnucks cream cheese offer. To enhance the campaign's reach, Schnucks also partnered with influencers. Four influencers picked their favorite recipe and promoted it through a video on their social media pages, including @melboban, @cierra.crowley, @rachel.tritsch, and @lizrotz.

This campaign reached nearly 600,000 shoppers and engaged over 9,000 people with email or Instagram posts. It also led to positive incremental growth for cream cheese.

## Cub Foods

In September, Midwest Dairy partnered with Cub Foods to highlight the numerous ways dairy can enhance every meal of the day. The partnership came to life in Cub Foods Fall Magazine, which featured creative and trendy recipes that took dairy to the next level.

The Milk and Cereal Remix was a standout creation, transforming a classic breakfast staple into a versatile, delightful treat. The campaign showcased four innovative milk-based recipes featuring Kemp's as Cub Foods' selected dairy advertising sponsor. The recipes included Cereal Milk

Panna Cotta, Fried Ice Cream Bars, Milk & Cereal Bars, and Strawberry Milkshake with Frosted Flakes Whipped Cream.

In addition to the magazine's four-page spread, these recipes were promoted through a robust digital campaign. This included social media posts on Facebook and Instagram, as well as Cub Foods' digital weekly ad circular features, eye-catching solo email banners, and sneak-peek campaigns.

As part of the fall festivities, Midwest Dairy collaborated with Cub Foods on an additional two-page spotlight for a Creamy Double Cheddar Mac & Cheese recipe. This activation echoed the success of the dairy-focused campaign with further digital and social media promotions.

The campaign successfully engaged a broad audience, reaching over one million viewers and generating an impressive total of 1.6 million views. While milk, cheese, and butter sales have been trending downward compared to last year, the decline is slowing. Incremental milk sales show promising improvement, narrowing the gap toward growth at this retailer.

## Appealing to families through new tactics

The We Are Family campaign was a partnership among checkoff, Walmart.com, and Dollar General aimed at connecting with shoppers who already purchase dairy and those who do not. It used targeted, personalized messaging in different forms to promote dairy products to consumers. This dairy messaging appeared creatively when grocery planning and shopping were top of mind, ultimately driving sales.

The campaign appealed to a wide range of shoppers for different reasons, targeting individuals seeking family meal ideas, kitchen hacks for busy parents, and ways to incorporate protein into their cooking. It also provided detailed information about growth, performance, and the importance of dairy nutrition during the first 1,000 days of a baby's life. Additionally, the campaign addressed diverse nutritional needs by highlighting options for gut health and lactose intolerance available in the dairy section. Overall, We Are Family was a well-rounded campaign that resonated with the entire family.

This campaign employed an omnichannel activation strategy to engage shoppers across digital platforms, directing traffic to online shopping sites. Adopting a customer-centric approach, the campaign seamlessly integrated all of the seller's channels, including physical store locations, apps, websites, and social media. Shoppers across these channels encountered a unified brand experience, with consistent messaging repeated in different spaces reminding them of the enjoyment and benefits of dairy. This campaign reached shoppers across digital touchpoints, driving traffic to Walmart.com and in-store at Dollar General by providing information and access to affordable, nutritious dairy products.

This was a collaborative effort, with many state and regional checkoffs participating in the campaign. Dairy Management West, United Dairy Industry of Michigan, DairyMAX, Midwest Dairy, Oregon Dairy Council, American Dairy Association Mideast, Dairy Farmers of Washington, Dairy West, American Dairy Association North East, and Florida Dairy Farmers all contributed funds to this campaign.

The We Are Family campaign centered on two major fall events: the back-to-school season and the kickoff of the sports season. It ran from July 29 to September 30, 2024. The investment from Midwest Dairy resulted in 2,169,000 incremental pounds of milk sold in the Midwest Dairy Region alone through both the Walmart digital campaign and the Dollar General in-store campaign.

# Research

## Pitch Competitions continue to fuel checkoff research

Advancing dairy research is a key strategy of dairy checkoff. Midwest Dairy funds research that solves industry challenges and partners with those who drive demand for dairy. Over the past few years, we have expanded and refined the pitch competition concept in the Chicago metro with exciting results. The competition has enabled Midwest Dairy and our partners to discover and support outstanding food and beverage entrepreneurs who value dairy products in their ingredients. Their passion and dedication to dairy have been instrumental in their business growth, and they continue to support the hard-working Midwest dairy farmers. Building on the success of our partnership with The Hatchery Chicago, Midwest Dairy was excited to expand the pitch competition concept to Omaha, Nebraska. This initiative followed our recent partnership with No More Empty Pots, which we established in the spring of 2024.

### The Hatchery Chicago

Midwest Dairy's partnership with The Hatchery Chicago began in 2022 with a co-hosted pitch contest offering the winner six months of free access to a commercial kitchen in Chicago's Garfield Park. Since then, the contest has expanded to include a first-place winner and two runners-up, all awarded access to commercial kitchens. In 2024, the contest remained open to established businesses that use at least 30% dairy in their ingredient base with no alternative dairy products. The first-place winner received one year of free rent at a commercial kitchen, while the runners-up received a six-month kitchen contract. Midwest Dairy was pleased to see this contest grow and offer more commercial kitchens, encouraging even more dairy innovation and sales. The goal is to help food vendors create a sustainable business that can grow into their own space, continuing to sell and promote dairy products. The success of the pitch competition reflects the entrepreneurial spirit and the potential for dairy innovation, inspiring us to continue supporting these ventures.

The Hatchery Chicago is a non-profit food and beverage incubator that supports local entrepreneurs in building and growing successful food businesses, cultivating local job opportunities for people from all backgrounds, and accelerating inclusive economic growth on Chicago's West side. It is one of North America's largest food and beverage incubators.

Midwest Dairy hosted the 2024 pitch contest in Chicago in late May. A judging panel of leaders across the dairy industry provided knowledge and feedback to help determine the winners. In total, six businesses were presented to the judges.

Congratulations to this year's contest winner Crafian Artisanal Toffee. This handcrafted toffee, made in Chicago, uses only premium and real ingredients. Founder Shawn Johnson envisions sourcing butter from Midwest Dairy farmers in the future, adding a local and sustainable touch to her specialty and international flavors. This first-place winner received a standard private kitchen with window co-branded signage for 12 months at The Hatchery Chicago. The first runner-up was Community Creamery, and the second runner-up was Esculent Eats LLC. Both winners will receive a standard private kitchen with window co-branded signage for six months.

"Winning the Midwest Dairy Sponsored Kitchen is a game changer for my business! Having access to a personal kitchen provides an opportunity to rapidly scale my production and flavor

innovations that cannot be overstated. However, I find myself even more excited about the opportunity to establish direct relationships with local farms, learn more about their process, and gain access to amazing quality dairy that can further elevate, and differentiate, my toffee. I can't wait to get started," said Shawn Johnson, owner and founder of Craffian Artisanal Toffee.

## No More Empty Pots

No More Empty Pots and Midwest Dairy announced our partnership this past spring, launching a pitch competition to advance Omaha, Nebraska's local entrepreneurship, foster innovation in product development, and contribute to the growth of the local dairy industry. Applicants adhered to the same rules as The Hatchery Chicago pitch competition. The No More Empty Pots pitch competition awarded two winners a \$10,000 prize earning, six months of kitchen rental, and other business development opportunities.

No More Empty Pots is a nonprofit organization that connects individuals and groups to improve self-sufficiency, regional food security, and economic resilience of urban and rural communities through advocacy and action. No More Empty Pots serves youth and seniors by providing educational and experiential learning and workforce readiness training. You can learn more about them by visiting [www.nmepomaha.org](http://www.nmepomaha.org).

Applications were due in early May, and contestants advanced through three rounds of pitches, with a final few contestants advancing to the last round held in early June. In total, five businesses made it to the final pitch round. Midwest Dairy is thrilled to congratulate the winners, Dundee Popcorn and Coffee Alley. Their innovative use of dairy in their products and their dedication to supporting local dairy farmers impressed us. Dundee Popcorn is a gourmet microwave popcorn business primarily selling at Omaha farmer's markets. They use real butter and currently sell four flavors: salty, spicy, cinnamon, and kettle. Dundee Popcorn prides itself on being made in small batches and not with butter flavor—just butter. Coffee Alley is a Latina-owned business offering trendy and traditional drinks. Its menu features familiar cafe beverages with unique Mexican twists, such as its popular Mexican coffee, brewed with traditional Mexican spices. The store also offers traditional Mexican baked goods.

As the winners, they received a prize package that included a \$10,000 check, six months of kitchen rental, and other business development opportunities. We are excited to see how they will continue to grow and innovate in the dairy industry. We also plan to expand our work with organizations like No More Empty Pots as our values line up as we look for businesses to help dairy farmers drive dairy sales.

"We deeply appreciate our partnership with Midwest Dairy for this shared venture. Their commitment to supporting dairy farmers and driving consumer demand aligns with our mission of promoting self-sufficiency. Together, we are creating impactful opportunities for food entrepreneurs in Omaha that support their livelihood while stimulating community-wide economic growth," said Talia McGill, President and CEO of No More Empty Pots.

## Midwest Dairy Foods Research Center 2024 executive summary

2024 was another successful and productive year for the Midwest Dairy Foods Research Center (MDFRC). With the completion and implementation of our 2024 Strategic Plan, we actively engaged stakeholders to align our initiatives with our mission: “develop dairy scientists and innovate dairy technologies, ingredients, and products through industry-driven collaborative research to drive regional and global opportunities for Midwest dairy farmers.” This mission was realized through the collaborative efforts of principal investigators across six member universities, graduate students, industry partners, Midwest Dairy, and Dairy Management Inc. (DMI).

The Dairy and Food Science Department at South Dakota State University (SDSU) welcomed new leadership under Dr. Londa Nwadike, the David A Thompson Endowed Department Head/Professor, with whom we have already established an effective working relationship. At SDSU, Dr. Prafulla Salunke, associate director of MDFRC, has made remarkable progress in expanding his research program and strengthening industry collaborations. He successfully conducted another year of the membrane filtration short course for the dairy industry, attracting 26 industry professionals. Additionally, he partnered with Dr. Maristela Rovai to organize a workshop on Avian influenza, which was attended by 60 dairy farmers, addressing critical concerns for dairy producers.

Under the mentorship of Dr. Maneesha Mohan, five students won awards in the Products Judging Competition across various categories, while two students achieved recognition in the New Product Development Competition. Additionally, a team from the University of Minnesota secured first place in the New Product Development Competition organized by DMI at the national level. Their innovative creation, Yay-tost, is a creamy Norwegian-style, brown, whey-based cheese spread that provides a rich source of protein, 3g of dietary fiber, and an excellent source of calcium. Dr. Jayendra Amamcharla coached the team.

The pilot plant facilities, including the Institute for Dairy Ingredient Processing, Davis Dairy Plant at SDSU, and The Joseph J. Warthesen Food Processing Center at the University of Minnesota, have continued fostering strong partnerships with regional dairy companies. These facilities remain essential in supporting industry-driven research and development. A significant milestone in 2024 was the appointment of a new dairy faculty member at Iowa State University (ISU) following the retirement of Dr. Stephanie Clark. This new hire, Dr. Dylan Liu, ensures the continuity of robust dairy processing education and research efforts at ISU. Dr. Liu has expertise in commercial manufacturing processes, food safety, production management, and education.

The 2024 Spring Research Planning Meeting, hosted by the University of Minnesota at St. Paul, welcomed over 60 representatives from the dairy industry and member universities. Industry partners outlined their research priorities and engaged in meaningful discussions with faculty members, aligning with the newly implemented strategic plan. This engagement led to a record 21 preproposals—three more than the previous year—reflecting a growing interest in research initiatives. Of these, 15 were invited to present at the annual meeting in Minnesota. Following rigorous evaluation, the advisory committee approved six new projects, bringing the total number of ongoing MDFRC-funded research projects to 20.

Six MDFRC students graduated in 2024 and successfully transitioned into the dairy and food industry, underscoring the center's role in workforce development. Furthermore, our research impact continues to grow, as evidenced by the publication of 40 peer-reviewed articles in international journals.

On behalf of the MDFRC, I sincerely thank the Midwest dairy farms and dairy farmers for their unwavering support and trust. We remain committed to exceeding expectations and driving continuous innovation in the dairy industry.

*- Dr. Jayendra Amamcharla*

## Lasso Grant showcase: Olmar Farms

In 2024, Midwest Dairy launched a free grant-writing support program for on-farm projects in partnership with Lasso. Lasso, a platform described as a “grant writer in a box”, is a valuable tool that helps individuals or organizations secure grants by identifying, applying for, and managing grant opportunities on behalf of farmers. The Lasso team, your grant-writer handyman, will be there every step of the way, identifying, applying for, and managing grant opportunities on your behalf. To participate, farmers must be open to grants, have a specific project in mind with potential installers/vendors/service providers identified, and be willing to serve as a case study for Midwest Dairy. More funding than ever is available to support sustainable businesses, and many dairy farmers qualify for these opportunities. Keep reading to learn about a Midwest Dairy farmer who saw success with this process in 2024.

Compass Rose Creamery is a start-up venture owned by Jill Nelson and her family in Sleepy Eye, Minnesota. The company aims to launch a specialty line of artisan cheeses and bottled milk products. Their dairy farm, Olmar Farms, is well-known for its high-quality Holstein genetics and sustainable farming practices, producing between 11,000 and 12,000 pounds of milk daily from a herd of 130 cows. The vision for Compass Rose Creamery is to expand its dairy business by establishing a local processing facility that focuses on farm-to-table dairy products, agri-tourism, and community engagement.

Jill and her family aimed to transition from solely producing raw milk to adding value through cheese and dairy processing. To achieve this, they needed specialized equipment and access to a creamery for production. However, they considered the financial risk of investing in a full-service creamery without first conducting market testing to be significant. Jill had previously looked into grant opportunities to help achieve this goal but often missed deadlines or encountered last-minute chances.

In 2024, she seized the opportunity to collaborate with Midwest Dairy partner Lasso, which made a significant difference. Through her work with Lasso, she learned about an upcoming grant cycle in advance, which enabled her to prepare her application more effectively. Although the business had prior experience with grant applications, challenges like a busy farming schedule, personal losses, and operational responsibilities often made it challenging to meet deadlines. The support from grant professionals at Lasso helped them stay on track. Working with Lasso provided Jill with a structured timeline to complete the grant applications without taking too much time away from her demanding schedule.

In the end, Jill worked with Lasso to prepare a grant application for the Dairy Business Builder (DBIA) grant and also submitted her own application for Minnesota’s AGRI Value-Add grant program. Ultimately, Compass Rose Creamery was awarded both the DBIA and AGRI grants. With the \$100,000 in grant funding, Compass Rose Creamery can acquire the necessary equipment for initial production at their leased creamery. This funding will enable them to test the market with small-batch cheese production, train their team in cheesemaking processes, and build brand awareness and customer interest before launching their full-scale facility.

Grant funding has allowed Compass Rose Creamery to take a crucial step toward launching its specialty dairy products. By strategically utilizing grant opportunities, the business gained valuable industry knowledge, tested its products, and prepared for a larger-scale operation while minimizing financial risk. This process highlighted the importance of careful planning, professional guidance, and perseverance in securing funding. Compass Rose Creamery is now well-positioned to advance in the dairy industry, offering fresh, locally sourced products and fostering a deeper connection with the community through agri-tourism and farm-based education. With the support Midwest Dairy and Lasso provide, they are experiencing growth on their farm.

Midwest Dairy is excited to share more success stories, as numerous farms have achieved positive results through Lasso's grant process. For more information on our grant writing successes or to learn more about Lasso's Grant Writing Support, please visit [midwestdairy.com](http://midwestdairy.com).

# Developing Leaders

## Midwest Dairy Ambassadors celebrate a successful year of dairy promotion

Midwest Dairy's Dairy Ambassador program offers an educational leadership opportunity for students passionate about the dairy industry. This year, Dairy Ambassadors represented their respective states at various events, connecting with consumers and answering their questions.

To be eligible for this program, participants must be enrolled full-time in a post-secondary school for the duration of the appointment and be passionate about dairy. Once accepted as ambassadors, participants can share dairy's story with consumers and network with their peers and industry professionals. After completing their year of service, each student is eligible to apply for a scholarship.

Midwest Dairy proudly offers Dairy Ambassador programs in Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, and South Dakota. Keep reading to learn about the experiences these outstanding individuals had in 2024!

### Illinois

To kick off their year, all four ambassadors came together in early May to tour Rolling Lawns Farm's Milk House, an off-farm micro-creamery and event center. They enjoyed lunch with owner Michael Turley, who shared leadership advice and led a creamery tour.

In late June, the group engaged with consumers at the Winnebago-Boone Breakfast on the Farm on the Boone County Fairgrounds. They played Dairy Trivia PLINKO with breakfast attendees and had a great time interacting with and answering questions from community members. In late July, Ambassador Julia Czepiel traveled to Chicago, where she helped Illinois Farm Families build trust between consumers and Illinois farmers at the Square Roots Festival. She engaged with Chicagoans through "Farm Four," a dupe for Connect Four, and a coloring mural. She enjoyed handing out Illinois Farm Families swag bags and engaging with Chicago consumers.

To round out their summer, Dairy Ambassadors connected with consumers at the Illinois State Fair. They spent most of their time in the Dairy Building, proudly representing the next generation of dairy leaders. Throughout the fall, they gave 17 different classroom presentations. They also participated in Quad Day at the University of Illinois. To end the year, one lucky ambassador had the chance to host trivia at the Marcoot Jersey Creamery.

Thank you to Shayden Hogg, Julia Czepiel, Hayley Pitts, and Alexa Reavley for their dedication to the Illinois Dairy Ambassador program.

## Iowa

Iowa had two Dairy Ambassadors traveling across the state to reach consumers and promote the dairy industry. They stayed busy this summer with many activities, primarily visiting different county fairs. The pair promoted dairy at the Jones County Fair, Buena Vista Fair, Sioux County Fair, and Mills County Fair. They volunteered at the Iowa State Fair, sharing dairy's story at the Iowa Food and Family Project booth, the Dairy Goodness Barn, and the Iowa Department of Agriculture Land Stewardship booth.

In addition to county and state fairs, they organized the Iowa Dairy Youth Communications Workshop and participated in various skill-building activities, including writing articles.

Dairy ambassador Maggie Cronk's article was selected for publication in the Dairy Herd Magazine. Madilynn Marburger and the Iowa Dairy Princess also helped boost dairy sales during an in-store promotion at the Johnston and Ankeny Hy-Vee.

Thank you to Cronk and Marburger for their dedication to the Iowa Dairy Ambassador program.

## Minnesota

The Minnesota Dairy Ambassadors used this summer to sharpen their social media skills and practice handling challenging questions through various trainings. The group also networked with other agriculture professionals at events like the Women's Environmental Network and the Annual Networking Night.

They put these skills to the test at several consumer-facing events. Ambassadors enjoyed helping at the Undeniably Dairy booth during the University of Minnesota Goldy Run, where they shared milk samples and handed out cooling towels to 5K and 10K runners. They used this opportunity to share messages about cow care. At a St. Paul Saints game, they shared stories about cow care and comfort through games and a photo backdrop for sports fans. The cowbells attracted fans to the booth, creating opportunities for ambassadors to engage in meaningful conversations. The group also participated in the Minnesota State Fair, where they assisted Midwest Dairy staff at the Undeniably Dairy booth by managing the spinning wheel, asking trivia questions, answering consumer questions about the industry, and passing out cold milk samples to fairgoers.

Thank you to Alexis Hoefs, Allison Foss, Brady Gille, Gracie Ash, Megan Ratka, and Selena Corona for their dedication to the Minnesota Dairy Ambassador program.

## Nebraska

Each year, the Nebraska Dairy Ambassadors participate in a day of dairy tours. Due to the need to shift away from on-farm experiences because of H5N1, the new Summer Experience was created. This experience allowed the ambassadors to build knowledge and understanding beyond the farm and dairy management practices. The daylong event, held in early July, included a variety of dairy experiences, including making ice cream with Melisa Konecky of Beauty View Farm, learning from Chef Nadar of Billy's Restaurant, and playing the "Add to Cart" game created by Midwest Dairy. Amy Schmidt, University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) Extension Professor, and

Livestock Manure Management Engineer spoke to the group about different sustainability practices dairy farmers are implementing. Schmidt covered water recycling and soil health information and provided key messages that ambassadors could use when engaging with consumers at different events. At the Nebraska Innovation Campus, Julie Reiling, senior consultant at UNL Food Science and Technology, gave the group a tour of the Food Processing Center.

Nebraska Dairy Ambassadors shared dairy's story at other events throughout the year, including the Nebraska State Fair, Husker Athletics events, UNL's College of Agriculture Sciences and Natural Resources Appreciation Event, Nebraska Dairy Promotion and Industry US Delegation Summit, and more.

For the third year, Nebraska's eligibility includes high school juniors, seniors, and college students. Thank you to Jenna Albers, Clara Bates, Allison Engelman, Tessa Haahr, Kaitlyn Hanson, Joslyn Hochstein, Brianna Klabenes, Jenna Muntz, Ava Noecker, and Emily Rempel for their dedication to the Nebraska Dairy Ambassador program.

## South Dakota

Participating in the annual Dairy Dash was one of the main activities for the South Dakota Dairy Ambassadors. The Dairy Dash is a partnership between Midwest Dairy and the South Dakota State University (SDSU) Miller Wellness Center to build trust in dairy among college-aged students and families. This event hosts a 5K race and a kid's "Moo Mile" held the same day as the SDSU Dairy Drive football game. Dairy Ambassadors encouraged runners to post milk mustache photos and sample various dairy products donated by partners. Kids were also invited to participate in an ice cream painting craft.

Ambassadors attended county fairs, engaging with visitors at their booths. They interacted with families, children, and agriculture peers to discuss dairy nutrition products. Some of these fairs included the Sioux Empire and Turner County Fairs. Finally, ambassadors attended the Got Milk Gala. This gala featured engaging activities, including an art contest showcasing dairy-themed artwork and a comedy performance by Farm Babe, known for her wit and humor. This celebration showcased the dairy community, fostered education, and provided a platform for conversation.

Thank you to Ifra Tun Nur, Muhammed Shijas, Ting Mao, Makenna Skiff, and Shafeeqa Irfan for their dedication to the South Dakota Dairy Ambassador program.

## Growth and change in the DEAL program for 2024

Midwest Dairy kicked off Class 3 of the Dairy Experience and Agricultural Leadership Program (DEAL), welcoming 17 new dairy leaders in 2024. This 18-month program provides an opportunity for young dairy farmers across the region to learn how to engage with consumers, conduct media interviews, network with industry and peers, and gain a deeper understanding of the dairy checkoff.

New in 2024, Midwest Dairy was excited to partner with The Dairy Alliance, the dairy checkoff organization for dairy farmers in eight states: Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia. This partnership enables young dairy farmers in those states to participate in our DEAL program alongside participants from Midwest Dairy. Our goal was for dairy farmers from Midwest Dairy's region to learn from and network with dairy farmers from other parts of the country. Two farmers from Kentucky and North Carolina are enrolled in Class 3.

"We are eager to partner with Midwest Dairy on this leadership opportunity for farmers across the Southeast. This program has proven successful in building leaders that support local communities and serve as advocates for agriculture," said Farrah Newberry, Vice President of Agricultural and Environmental Affairs at The Dairy Alliance. The DEAL Program consists of three phases, each involving in-person meetings and local assignments, such as meeting with local leaders and participating in a consumer event. The first phase focuses on the dairy checkoff and discovering each participant's strengths and how to use them effectively. This first phase took place in February when Class 3 of the held its first meeting in Nashville, TN. The Dairy Alliance was excited to host the event and kick off DEAL Class 3. During this meeting, the farmers had the opportunity to learn more about one another, network, and gain a deeper understanding of the dairy checkoff program.

Phase 1 began with a leadership training session focused on four key personality traits. Attendees explored their strengths and learned how to apply them when collaborating. The following day, participants delved deeper into the dairy checkoff program. Midwest Dairy staff facilitated a discussion on the organization's history, mission, and strategic plan. Denise Jones, Senior Manager of Agriculture and Environmental Affairs for the Dairy Alliance in Kentucky and Tennessee, also provided insights. The morning concluded with a presentation by Stan Erwine, Senior Vice President of Farmer Relations at Dairy Management Inc. (DMI). Stan discussed the history and purpose of dairy promotion and DMI, emphasizing the importance of their collaborative relationship with Midwest Dairy and the Dairy Alliance in maximizing the effectiveness of checkoff funds.

Participants also traveled to Chapel Hill for a farm tour at Nash Family Creamery, where they enjoyed delicious ice cream from their creamery to finish the tour. To wrap up the day, they participated in a fun group activity – Hopping aboard a trolley for the Soul of Music City Tour, which helped them explore the musical roots of Nashville. On the third and final day, they focused on getting to know each other better.

Class 3 of DEAL convened in Chicago, Illinois, in November for Phase 2 of the program. The theme for this phase was “Engaging with Consumers.” The event provided learning opportunities to equip DEAL members with skills to connect with consumers in person and online.

The meeting began by exploring consumer insights to better understand dairy trends in retail and how Gen Z perceives dairy products. Kim Bremmer from Ag Inspirations presented communication strategies to help DEAL members share scientific information and effectively engage with consumers. The next day, participants discussed engaging with consumers online, with Don Schindler of Dairy Management Inc. leading the presentations. He emphasized the importance of an online presence for sharing stories and creating a digital legacy. Don also covered creating captivating social media videos and shared best practices for answering tough questions online.

The group also toured The Hatchery, a Midwest Dairy partner. They explored its facilities and listened to three entrepreneurs who won the Midwest Dairy pitch contest. DEAL members were also thrilled to sample the delicious foods created by these entrepreneurs. On the final day of the meeting, participants gained insights into Gen Z and learned how Midwest Dairy is engaging with this audience in meaningful ways. The meeting concluded with an interactive group activity where DEAL members planned a local dairy promotion event based on the scenario provided. With the goal of “Bringing Dairy to Life,” this hands-on workshop allowed them to apply what they learned throughout the meeting.

DEAL members also had the opportunity to network with each other. Helping these farmers develop relationships with other like-minded dairy farmers is a key component of this program, and this class has become a tight-knit group. On the post-event survey, one farmer said, “There were a lot of great discussions. I enjoyed the hands-on activities during the sessions. I loved the tour of The Hatchery and meeting and trying the pitch contest winners’ products.” Another farmer commented, “I enjoyed all the sessions and discussions that took place.”

The third and final phase of the program will take place in the summer of 2025.

Congratulations to the participants of DEAL Class Three listed below:

- Amber Selman, IA
- Jennifer Bronner, IA
- Katherine Boelen, IA
- Kendra Holland, IL
- Amanda Zigan, MN
- Brittany Moore, MN
- Cole Hoscheit, MN
- Elizabeth Golombiecki-Anderson, MN
- Kevin Korbel, MN
- Quinci Schmidt, MN
- Jess Wohler, KS
- Todd Pauly, KS
- Aaron Stewart, MO
- Nicolas Dotson, NO
- Allison Alder, NE
- Rachel Gray, NC
- Caden Cowherd, KY