



**Molly Pelzer**  
CEO, Midwest Dairy

## Setting the stage for 2021

As we wrap up 2020 and look ahead to a new year, we have so much to reflect on. I'm proud of the resiliency, inventiveness, and adaptability we have witnessed during this challenging year, focused on maximizing your checkoff investment to build sales and trust for dairy.

On behalf of dairy farmers, Midwest Dairy staff remained nimble, consistently focused on being the most reliable and resourceful partner possible. In fact, this month, we are excited to collaborate on a record number of retailer and foodservice activations throughout our region, designed to creatively drive dairy sales.

Throughout the year, we've embraced new opportunities to share dairy's story through research and insights presentations with key thought leaders and by finding creative ways to connect dairy farmers, partners, influencers, and consumers. You can read more about these efforts in this issue.

While much of this work was not exactly what we planned as



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[Learn more about your checkoff investment at work!](#)

we began this year, it has set the stage for a strong new year as we look to build upon all we have learned and kick off our new three-year strategic plan.

This month also marks the end of my first year as CEO. I cannot tell you how energized and excited I am about everything we have accomplished together this year. Your Midwest Dairy staff will remain dedicated to demonstrating a strong return on your checkoff investment in 2021 and beyond.

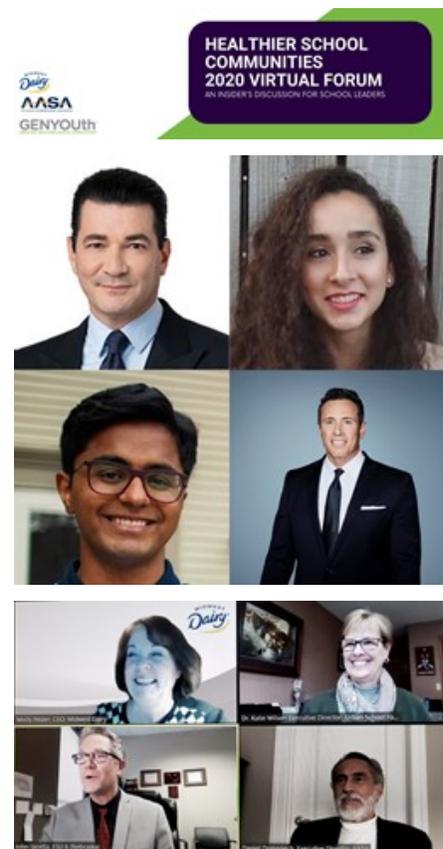
On behalf of Midwest Dairy, we wish you and your families a joyous holiday season, and a happy, healthy New Year!

## Safe, healthy, nourished: A new playbook for schools virtual forum

“Schools are the epicenters of student well-being,” was the rallying cry for the Healthier School Communities Forum on December 15. This virtual event brought together over 750 of the top school, public health, and media experts from across the country to discuss the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and identify solutions to help fight the growing food insecurity many are facing. It was a follow-up to a years-long partnership between Midwest Dairy, the National Dairy Council and GENYOUth to better understand the impact nutrition and wellness has on overall student learning and development, and then, this year, how the pandemic has shed a different light on the important role schools play in providing children with access to food.

Since March 2020, food insecurity has escalated by 20%, reaching Depression-era statistics. One in 4 U.S. children is now living with food insecurity, up from 1 in 7 prior to the pandemic (USDA Economic Research Service, September 2019). The numbers are even more alarming for minority students with 1 in 3 living in food-insecure households.

A panel moderated by Midwest Dairy CEO Molly Pelzer shed light on the value of school wellness. The panel featured Dan Domenech, executive director of the American Association of School Administrators; Dr. Katie Wilson, executive director of the Urban School Food Alliance and Dr. John Skretta, a veteran school



superintendent from Nebraska. They discussed the growing face of food insecurity in a COVID-19 world and how the pandemic is impacting schools, administrators, and local communities. Schools are ground zero for fighting hunger in our country as Dr. Wilson commented, "School meals are the best safety net for all children."

GENYOUth CEO, Alexis Glick rounded out the forum with conversations with Dr. Scott Gottlieb, former FDA commissioner and CNN's Chris Cuomo. Dr. Gottlieb discussed the vaccine rollout and how it could aid schools in reopening. He was cautiously optimistic that students might return to the classroom in late winter or early spring. Cuomo talked about how leaders can best share their stories as schools face unprecedented financial challenges. He challenged leaders to "dare to care" and find stories that resonate with the public.

The virtual forum and companion [Healthier School Community report](#) continues dairy farmer's 100-plus year history supporting child health and wellness initiatives. [Click here to listen to the forum.](#)

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## Dairy sustainability webinar provides new shopper marketing inspiration to Midwest retailers and processors

Nearly 100 members of the dairy community gathered virtually on November 3 to hear the latest 2020 learnings about what sustainability means to today's consumer during Midwest Dairy's webinar, [Fostering Dairy Sustainability in Today's Retail Environment](#).

Among the information shared was that half of consumers surveyed say the pandemic has made them more aware of the environment and 58% of Americans say we should respond to climate change with the same urgency we have responded to COVID-19.

[Sarah Hanson](#), executive vice president for the Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy, joined as a guest speaker during the webinar to share more about the dairy community's [sustainability initiatives and goals](#).

The event wrapped up with Midwest Dairy sharing three new sustainability marketing concepts to inspire Midwest partners to take action in bringing dairy's sustainability story to life for consumers. In a post-webinar survey, three dairy processors and four retailers indicated they plan to use the marketing concepts shared in the webinar with their product and/or in their stores. One processor commented, "this is one of the best webinars I've listened to."

Midwest Dairy plans to continue hosting consumer insights webinars in 2021 to bring the latest consumer learnings to our partner audiences.

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## Research uncovers new opportunities for lactose

Lactose is the second most abundant component in milk and yet the most underutilized dairy ingredient due to its oversupply in the dairy industry. Currently, lactose is largely used in infant foods and confectionery applications.

The conversion of lactose in the permeate into new value-added food ingredients such as sweeteners has become a research priority as this will increase opportunities for lactose utilization. Dr. Sergio Martinez-Monteaagudo's team at South Dakota State University, developed a two-step process to convert lactose into a novel sweetening syrup made of glucose, galactose, fructose, and tagatose.

### Why Tagatose?

The sweetness strength of tagatose is 90% of that of sucrose. In addition, the caloric value of tagatose is half of that of sucrose which makes tagatose an ideal sweetener. Due to its poor solubility and lower sweetness value, lactose itself is not commonly preferred as a sweetener. However, converting lactose into a sweetening syrup containing tagatose will uncover more opportunities for lactose conversion products as sweeteners in several applications.

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## Midwest Dairy partners with Pizza Ranch to launch breakfast pizzas

Midwest Dairy is once again partnering with Pizza Ranch to launch a new offering: take-and-bake breakfast pizzas. Beginning in December, 3 varieties of breakfast pizza will be available: sausage and gravy; bacon and sausage; and sausage, peppers, and onions.

During the month of December, you can order a frozen, take-and-bake breakfast pizza for \$7.99 each and get a second one free.

Midwest Dairy has connected farmyard friends, Iowa Egg Council and Iowa Pork Producers Association, to help promote the new products for the year-long efforts.

Marketing efforts will include digital advertising, email blasts, box toppers, and social media.



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## Fueling dairy's success through e-commerce channels

The latest episode of Midwest Dairy's Dairy on the Air podcast – [Fueling dairy's success through e-commerce channels](#) – features an in-depth discussion with Paul Ziemnisky, executive vice president of Global Innovation Partnerships at Dairy Management Inc. (DMI). Ziemnisky shares his insights on the dairy industry's growing relationship with Amazon and what this means for dairy now that more consumers are grocery shopping online due to the pandemic.

In a conversation with host Andy Vance, Ziemnisky discusses the beginnings of DMI's relationship with Amazon, which started in early 2019 when DMI reached out to learn more about Amazon's foray into the fresh food and beverage scene. Ziemnisky also shares how his team partnered with Amazon's leadership to help tell dairy's story in the digital space, giving Amazon a "Dairy 101" lesson on merchandising best practices, using facts to build credibility and showcase the power of real dairy. Ziemnisky says the future is bright for the dairy community, especially with the exciting opportunity to have the second-largest company in the world share dairy's story, connecting consumers with the sustainable farm to table journey.

Ziemnisky also discusses the timing of this relationship, and how there has been an acceleration of e-commerce over the past several months due to the COVID-19 pandemic with 54% of households now ordering groceries online and noting that once consumers start shopping online, they rarely stop.

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



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