



TRIMESTER 1

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SUCCESS PLAN PROGRESS REPORT: BUILDING STRATEGIC MOMENTUM

Dairy Council of California (DCC) has changed its Success Plan reporting from quarters to trimesters to provide timely updates to the Board of Directors. Trimester One marks the first period of implementing the new Objectives and Key Results (OKRs)-driven strategic framework, uniting staff, strategies and actions to reach measurable outcomes.

The focus of the OKRs is to advance science-based dairy nutrition through coordinated impact across three external strategies: Education, Advocacy and Collaboration, and internally through Thriving Organization. This will be demonstrated through key results, program reach and stories throughout the year.

Trimester One demonstrated the strength of alignment, collaboration and strategic intent as DCC implements a new way to demonstrate accomplishments. Dairy Council of California is well positioned for success in Trimester Two and ready to demonstrate measurable influence across California.

AT A GLANCE

STRATEGIC IMPACT SNAPSHOT

THEMATIC IMPACT & HIGHLIGHTS

**FY 2025-2026
JULY-OCTOBER 2025**

AT A GLANCE

655K

CA State Fair Visitors
*exposed to dairy
education firsthand*

200K

Broadcast Viewers
*of Let's Eat Healthy
Together Season 2*

107,668

Students
*attended the Mobile
Dairy Classroom*

20K

Newsletter Readers
*engaged with digital
education content*

73K

Nutrition Resources
*ordered and
downloaded
statewide*

70%

Strategic Activities
*aligned with FY25–26
goals*

STRATEGIC IMPACT SNAPSHOT

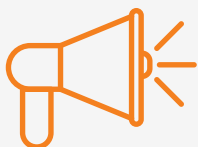
Across 110 strategic activities executed in Trimester One, the following highlights showcase DCC's progress across four strategic pillars:

EDUCATION



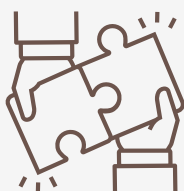
- Expanded reach to 11,944+ influenced contacts.
- Launched formative testing for the 4th-grade unit.
- Distributed dairy ag literacy banners across 13 county fairs.
- Participated in seven exhibits targeting priority sectors: education, healthcare and government.

ADVOCACY



- Contributed to national and state-level efforts in defending dairy against ultra-processed food (UPF) misclassification.
- Disseminated five thought leadership publications and 11 newsletters to priority audiences.
- Reached 380 professionals through podium presentations at 10 conferences.

COLLABORATION



- Forged multi-sector partnerships with Los Angeles Unified School District and PBS for broadcast series.
- Nuestros Sabores Symposium reached 60 professionals.
- Secured school food services director endorsement for USDA Team Nutrition dairy recipe, Cheesy Beef Pasta, now added to DCC's recipe card set and live on our website.

THRIVING ORG



- Achieved 100% staff completion of Objectives and Key Results & AI training, exceeding the 90% target, ensuring alignment for FY25–26 execution.
- Submitted two external funding applications.

THEMATIC IMPACT & HIGHLIGHTS

Elevating Dairy's Voice in Critical Conversations

This trimester, DCC didn't just talk about dairy—the organization shaped the conversation at the highest levels. DCC's science-based advocacy positioned dairy as essential to healthy, sustainable eating patterns in three landmark engagements:

- **World Health Organization Global Guidance:** Provided comprehensive dairy nutrition recommendations for World Health Organization's guidance, ensuring dairy's functional benefits are recognized globally through International Dairy Federation-U.S. membership.



"In this space I learned a lot about dairy and how important it can be for disease prevention and treatment." — Kasaundra Heiberger MSPAS, MPH, PA-C Faculty - Touro University California



- **Ultra-Processed Food Policy:** Positioned dairy appropriately in emerging UPF discussions through various strategic activities, including the submission of public comments and development of educational tools, protecting dairy's reputation while informing science-based policy.
- **International Dairy Federation:** Contributed to novel research discussions on dairy's functional health benefits and sustainable nutrition, amplifying California's leadership in dairy science.
- **Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGA) 2025-2030:** Submitted public comments and engaged school food service leadership and health professionals in DGA discussions through presentations and tools.

Professional Development Impact: Beyond informing policy, DCC reached 584 health care and education professionals through professional development sessions, including the Champion Provider Fellowship program and the 12th Annual School Wellness Summit. Each interaction builds a network of dairy advocates who amplify dairy nutrition messages through their communities.

THEMATIC IMPACT & HIGHLIGHTS

Building DCC's Audience & Partnerships

Strategic audience growth has multiplied dairy's reach—DCC's aim is to strategically identify partners and professionals poised to become dairy advocates through relationship building and targeted engagement.

The Strategy:

- Engaged health care and education professionals at conferences (California Agriculture in the Classroom (CAITC), California State Polytechnic University, Pomona (Cal Poly Pomona), California School Nutrition Association, Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior (SNEB)).
- Provided immediately useful resources (nutrition education curriculum, World School Milk Day campaign toolkits, dairy recipes tailored for school foodservice operations).
- Engaged key audiences that converted to verified contacts in DCC's database.
- Created multiplier effects as professionals shared resources with their networks.

The Result:

- **1,100+** verified professionals added to priority audience database, including 220+ health professional contacts (Physician Assistants, Registered Dietitian Nutritionists, health care providers).
- **8+** school districts committed to World School Milk Day social media activations.
- **507** students at Hidden Valley Elementary Celebrated World School Milk Day (a subset of the 8+ school districts above). A dairy princess attended, along with Jen Beretta, the local dairy farmer, and Clo the cow.
- **162** teachers engaged at California Agriculture in the Classroom Conference, attending DCC's Dairy Ag Explorers and Make-and-Take sessions.
- **105** nutrition professionals engaged at SNEB on dairy nutrition during the critical first 1,000 days.



"This presentation was super clear and informative. I really liked being able to look over the materials provided. I'll definitely be sharing the Healthy Eating Table with my family."

— California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo Student

Every professional DCC reaches has the potential to become a force multiplier—teachers who implement DCC curriculum, dietitians who recommend dairy to patients, administrators who partner on programs. The organization is building relationships for impact.

THEMATIC IMPACT & HIGHLIGHTS

Collaborating for Impact

DCC's collaboration strategy recognizes a fundamental truth: the organization can accomplish more together than alone. Trimester One brought this principle to life through various signature initiatives:

Key Collaborations:

Co-hosted Nuestros Sabores: Culinary Medicine Symposium with National Dairy Council, reaching 60 healthcare professionals and elevating dairy science in Latino health conversations through culturally relevant programming.

Co-hosted dairy farm tour at Tollcrest Farms with Mother Lode California School Nutrition Association: reaching 29 school nutrition leaders that influence 143,172 students.

California Academy of Physician Assistants (CAPA) partnership expanded knowledge of the health benefits of dairy to 3,600 physician assistants through quarterly publications.

Completed formative testing of 4th grade nutrition unit with 20 teachers and 500+ students.



"DCC has established a solid infrastructure and is a gold standard for many other (marketing) boards."
— Claudia Carter,
California School
Nutrition Association



"We need to talk about all the nutritional capabilities dairy has, and with that in mind, incorporate the cultural aspect." — Juan Aguilera MD, PhD, MPH, Assistant Professor - UTHealth Houston

HOARD'S DAIRYMAN

School nutrition: Insights from a dairy dialogue

June 30 2025

By Amy DeLisio, Dairy Council of California



Earlier this year, Dairy Council of California convened Well-Nourished, Brighter Futures: Dairy Dialogue in Sacramento, Calif. Centered on envisioning equitable and sustainable solutions for school meals and scholar success, the event brought together school nutrition professionals, dietitians, dairy community leaders, and allied partners around a common goal: supporting student achievement through access to nutrient-dense school meals.

Participants explored a variety of aspects of school meals to identify challenges, opportunities, and actionable solutions. In addition, they examined strategies to reduce food and packaging waste, expand local dairy purchasing, and support school nutrition programs to meet evolving federal and state nutrition standards and sustainability goals.

Key informant interviews uncovered three core challenges:

- There is a lack of in-school nutrition education, particularly around dairy.
- There is limited understanding of logistics for integrating dairy into school meals.
- There is insufficient communication between the dairy community, school nutrition staff, and students.

In January 2025, Dairy Dialogue attendees discussed ways to boost the understanding of school food service and processor needs related to evolving school meal standards. Also important was envisioning the future to ensure positive positioning of milk and dairy foods in school meal programs to support student nutrition security. Looking for collaborative sustainability efforts that support schools, they considered how to reduce waste and increase local food purchasing. At the end of the day, the group prioritized three key actionable strategies:

- Redefine what nutrition education means in schools by centering evidence-based nutrition, engaging youth in their own learning, and emphasizing farm-to-cafeteria supply chains.
- Broaden the opportunities for young people to enjoy dairy by incorporating a wider cultural variety of dairy foods and emphasizing the human and cultural connections dairy foods provide.
- Activate community support through collaboration, advocacy, and education and extend the work of dairy community leaders across the state.

The results of this process exemplify the need for dairy champions across the state to continue investing in innovative solutions that promote student wellness. By working together, everyone has a role in shaping more equitable, sustainable, and nourishing school meals by driving innovation, elevating nutrition education, and positioning dairy's important role in fueling scholar success. Join us in our efforts by visiting DairyCouncilofCA.org.

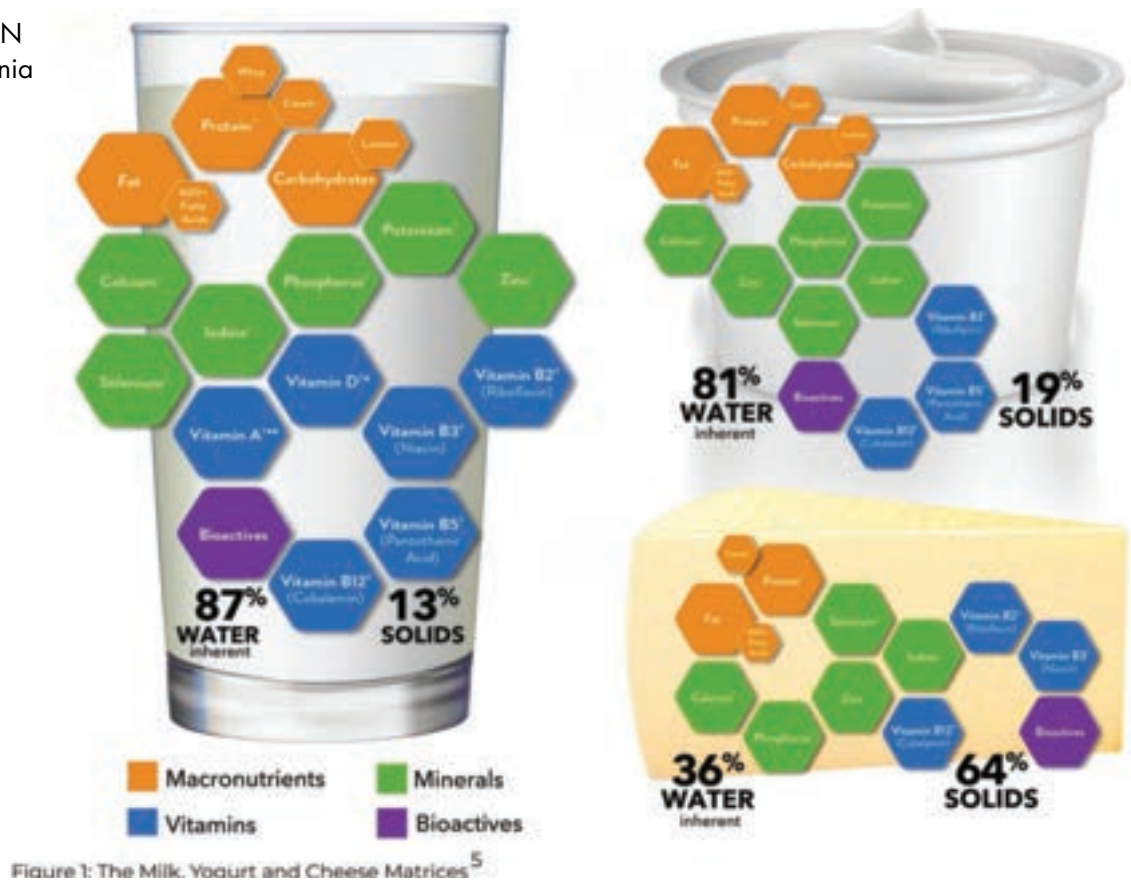
To comment, email your remarks to intel@hoards.com.

(c) Hoard's Dairyman Intel 2025

June 30, 2025

The Food Matrix Matters

By Bessie O'Connor, RDN
Dairy Council of California



For decades, nutrition guidance has largely focused on individual nutrients, often cautioning against excessive intake of fat, sodium and sugar, while encouraging underconsumed nutrients such as potassium, fiber, calcium and vitamin D. This nutrient-based approach remains important. However, it's increasingly clear that health outcomes may depend less on isolated nutrients and more on how those nutrients interact within the structure of foods, also known as food matrices. This advance in nutrition research invites a broader conversation about the role of food and nutrition in health outcomes.

The food matrix refers to the physical and chemical structure of a food, including how components such as fats, protein, carbohydrates and micronutrients are organized and interact during digestion and metabolism.¹ The food matrix provides a deeper understanding of how food behaves in the body. It encompasses factors like texture, particle size, degree of processing and the presence of bioactive compounds such as polyphenols in fruits and vegetables or milk fat globule membranes in dairy foods. These structural elements influence how different foods and nutrients are absorbed and metabolized, and ultimately how they impact health.

The dairy food matrix provides a great example of how the interaction of nutrients and bioactive components within the food structure can influence health outcomes beyond individual nutrients. For instance, despite containing saturated fat and

sodium, cheese is associated with reduced risks of mortality and heart disease.² This effect is likely explained by the complex interaction of protein, calcium, phosphorus, magnesium and unique microstructures such as milk fat globule membranes within the cheese matrix. Similarly, yogurt consumption is linked to a lower risk of type 2 diabetes, better weight maintenance and improved cardiovascular health.³ Fermented dairy such as yogurt, kefir and some cheese offers a package of probiotics and nutrients in a unique delivery system that slows digestion and supports gut health, helping to explain its positive impact on disease prevention.

For physician assistants, embracing the food matrix concept enhances patient care by supporting more holistic, food-based



The Food Matrix Matters

nutrition counseling. It encourages moving beyond single-nutrient messages to practical, whole-food guidance that patients can apply. Furthermore, the foods that make up an eating pattern have interactive, synergistic and cumulative relationships that better predict health beyond individual foods or food groups.⁴ Milk, yogurt and cheese in the context of balanced dietary patterns that include fruits, vegetables, whole grains, eggs, nuts, seeds, fish and lean meats support evidence-based nutrition guidance. ♦

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NOURISHING BRIGHTER FUTURES WITH DAIRY

BUILDING MOMENTUM TOWARD EQUITABLE, NOURISHING SCHOOL MEALS

*By: Alyssa McCelland, Initiatives and Engagement
Director at Dairy Council of California*

School nutrition professionals are no strangers to innovation. From adapting to evolving nutrition standards to leading sustainability and student engagement efforts, you are transforming school meals. And just this year, a unique conversation helped amplify that work in a new way.

Well-Nourished, Brighter Futures: Dairy Dialogue, hosted by Dairy Council of California, brought together leaders in school nutrition, dairy, agriculture, education and youth advocacy to explore how milk and dairy foods can support student success in more inclusive, sustainable and engaging ways.

This collaborative event created space to address shared challenges and inspire fresh thinking about the role of dairy in school meals—from farm to cafeteria. The dialogue united voices across sectors to shape a vision for meals that are nutritious, student-centered and future-ready.

Insights From the Dairy Dialogue

Participants dug deep into the systems shaping student meals. Together, they uncovered some common goals:



Dairy Beyond the Carton

While milk is a staple offering in school meals, there was wide agreement that dairy has opportunities to nourish students in new and creative ways. Attendees voiced the desire to elevate dairy's role in meals through scratch cooking, culturally relevant recipes and inclusive options like lactose-free milk.

As part of the creative design session, attendees shared ideas for dishes like yogurt-based sauces and cottage cheese, which is trending with students on TikTok, to reflect the diversity of California's student population while bridging culture and nutrition.

Sustainability at Every Step

With schools working hard to reduce waste and meet packaging requirements, the dialogue sparked fresh ideas for aligning dairy with environmental goals. Innovations such as bulk milk dispensers, waste audits and compostable packaging are already underway, the dialogue has fostered collaborative conversations among schools and dairy processors to identify challenges and ideate solutions.

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Student Voice and Food Literacy

One of the most energizing takeaways? Students are ready to lead. Youth participants expressed excitement about co-designing their cafeteria experiences, including being involved in decisions on the foods offered and how nutrition is taught. “We want meals to reflect who we are and where we come from,” one youth panelist shared. “If we help design them, we’re more likely to eat them—and understand them.” The need to include dairy into farm to school activities was also identified.

These themes echoed throughout the event’s breakout sessions, where cross-sector teams envisioned strategies to make dairy more visible, approachable and valued in schools.

Looking Ahead: The Future of School Meals Is Collaborative

Well-Nourished, Brighter Futures: Dairy Dialogue made one thing clear: When school nutrition professionals, students, food industry and community partners work together, school meals become more than just food. They become a platform for learning, health and empowerment.

Many participants left the event with project ideas for their schools and districts, including:

- Culturally responsive dairy recipe pilots
- Student-driven “School Meal Visioning Labs”
- Waste reduction challenges tied to dairy packaging
- Farm-to-School immersion programs
- Expanded nutrition campaigns
- Lactose-free and inclusive dairy menu trials

By aligning efforts across the cafeteria, curriculum and community, California schools can continue to lead the way, not just in what’s served but in how students experience and understand food.



From Dialogue to Celebration: World School Milk Day

As schools look ahead to the new academic year, there’s an ideal opportunity to nourish brighter futures together by bringing ideas and energy into classrooms, cafeterias and communities: World School Milk Day, September 24, 2025.

This global celebration, held each fall, is a chance to highlight the health benefits of milk and the power of school meals. We invite you to participate in this global campaign and check out our [Dairy Council of California toolkit](#) to help schools plan celebrations that are fun, flexible and full of learning.

The toolkit includes:

- Milk nutrition facts that help students connect what they drink to how they grow and learn.
- Project ideas that link dairy to subjects like science, art and agriculture.
- Facts like:
- School milk travels from farm to cafeteria in just two days.
- Dairy is California’s #1 agricultural product.
- Milk supports strong bones, teeth, muscles and energy for play and focus.

Your Call to Action: Start Planning Now

Planning a World School Milk Day event doesn’t have to be elaborate. Even small celebrations can have a big impact when students feel included and curious. To learn more, visit DairyCouncilofCA.org/WSMD. Share your event photos and stories using #WSMD2025.

THE POWER OF WORKING TOGETHER

CHAPTER 20 UPDATES

By Tina Egan, District Director Red Bluff Union Elementary, 2024 - 2025 President, CSNA Chapter 20

As I reflect on my year serving as President of CSNA Chapter 20, one theme rises to the top: the power of partnership. This year reminded me—again and again—that we are stronger together. Whether we're serving meals in our school cafeterias, developing innovative programs, or advocating at the Capitol, we all share a common mission: supporting the health, development, and success of California's students through nutrition.

Although I was unable to attend this year's CSNA Legislative Action Conference in Sacramento, I was so proud that our chapter was represented with strength and professionalism by our industry partners, who attended and made legislative visits on our behalf. These partners, who show up year after year, took our messages and stories directly to legislators and their staff. Their dedication allowed Chapter 20's voice to be heard and ensured that student nutrition remained a top priority in state conversations.

A standout moment from the conference included a meeting with Erik Brahms, Chief of Staff to Senator Megan Dahle. During this meeting, our partners highlighted the impact of child nutrition programs in schools, emphasized the need for continued investment, and shared how local partnerships are making a difference in our region. It was a moment of advocacy that truly reflected our collective strength—school professionals and industry working as one team.



That spirit of collaboration continued back in our own community in a heartfelt way. We were honored to welcome Alice Bennett, Senator Dahle's district coordinator, to a local gathering to recognize the retirement of one of our own: Sean Hays. Sean has been a steadfast leader and champion for students throughout his career, and his retirement was a milestone worthy of celebration. With school nutrition staff, administrators, and industry partners in attendance, Alice presented Sean with a California Assembly Certificate in honor of his years of dedicated service. It was a moment that brought tears, applause, and a deep sense of appreciation for a career that has truly made a difference.

These moments are more than ceremonial—they are reminders of what we can accomplish when we build bridges, show up for each other, and lead with purpose. The partnerships we've cultivated across schools, government, and industry are what make Chapter 20 so successful and respected.

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As my term comes to an end, I feel a deep sense of pride. We've had an incredible year filled with meaningful progress and powerful collaboration. And now, with the installation of our new officers, the future is bright. This new team brings energy, experience, and a shared vision for advancing our mission in even greater ways. I am confident that under their leadership, our chapter will continue to grow, inspire, and lead the way in child nutrition.

To our industry partners—thank you for always stepping in when needed. To our school staff and

members—thank you for your dedication and heart. And to Sean—thank you for showing us what a lifetime of impact looks like.

Serving as Chapter 20 President has been the honor of a lifetime. I am grateful for every conversation, every shared challenge, and every victory we achieved together. Here's to another year of service, advocacy, and nourishment—for our students and for one another.





HOW FARM-TO-SCHOOL ADVANCES NUTRITION, LEARNING, AND LOCAL FOOD SYSTEMS

By: Rajwinder Kaur, Dairy Council of California

As Farm-to-School participation continues to grow across California, schools are doing more than serving local foods. They are building resilient food systems, deepening food literacy and supporting lifelong healthy eating patterns for their students. At its core, Farm-to-School nurtures a deeper appreciation for nutrition and agriculture while helping build a healthier, more connected future for students, schools and communities.

Through local food procurement, school gardens, agriculture-based education, taste testing and farm tours, enriching experiences for students go far beyond the cafeteria. These efforts encourage children to explore where their food comes from, make informed food choices and understand how eating habits connect to broader systems of health, sustainability and equity.

The impact is measurable. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's 2023 Farm to School Census, 77.4% of California school food authorities participate in Farm-to-School initiatives, with 67% (882 respondents) serving local food. Reported benefits include increased consumption of fruits and vegetables, higher school meal participation and reduced food waste.

Dairy a Powerful Piece of the Puzzle

Despite being one of the most procured local foods in schools, dairy is often overlooked in Farm-to-School narratives. In 2023, milk was the top agricultural commodity produced in California, and it continues

to be a key contributor to nutrition security in school meals.

Dairy foods like milk, yogurt and cheese provide high-quality protein, calcium, vitamin D and potassium, which are essential for growth and development. These foods support student health, cognitive performance and overall well-being, making them a natural fit for Farm-to-School integration.

Local procurement also offers unique opportunities to introduce agricultural commodities in engaging ways that support education and cultural awareness. For example, Kern High School District partnered with a local dairy processor to host a global summer dairy foods tasting for students. Sweet and Spicy Cottage Cheese and Tzatziki-Style Dip were featured, and the feedback was overwhelmingly positive.

"It is always the best to introduce students of all grade levels to something different and new," said Richard Andrews, Nutrition Services Administrator of Kern High School District and past president of the California School Nutrition Association. "They truly appreciate the inclusion and, more importantly, the interaction. It shows them their opinions and voices matter to the people making key decisions concerning them."

Other districts are using Farm-to-School to bring dairy education to life. Menifee Union School District organized a dairy farm field trip for third graders following a Mobile Dairy Classroom visit. One student, Jayleen, shared,

"My favorite part of the dairy field trip was feeding the cows and seeing how the milk machine works. Thank you, California Dairy Council."

Similarly, Val Verde Unified School District included the Mobile Dairy Classroom in its summer meals programming to connect students with agriculture while promoting balanced meals.

These activities not only elevate the food students are consuming but also strengthen food literacy and encourage students to see themselves as informed eaters, advocates and community members.

A Year-Round Effort

While October is nationally recognized as Farm to School Month, the values behind Farm-to-School can and should be celebrated all year long. Dairy Council of California's Well-Nourished, Brighter Futures: Dairy Dialogue report affirms that advancing student wellness requires ongoing collaboration between educators, nutrition leaders, farmers, food industry and students.

The report's findings highlight the need for more culturally inclusive offerings, greater nutrition education both in and outside the classroom, and stronger partnerships between school districts and local food producers. Participants in the dialogue identified dairy as a key component of healthy school meals and called for more intentional efforts to incorporate it throughout the school year.

Supportive Resources

Schools looking to expand Farm-to-School efforts can use the following free resources from Dairy Council of California:

- Toolkit for Farm-to-You Tours: A step-by-step guide to planning farm tour field trips. DairyCouncilofCA.org/F2S
- Dairy Around the World Activity Sheet: A classroom activity that highlights global dairy traditions and cultural food connections. DairyCouncilofCA.org/DAW

By integrating dairy into Farm-to-School through local suppliers, lessons, taste tests, tours and more, California schools can support healthier students, more informed consumers and stronger local communities, one meaningful experience at a time.

The top portion of the image is a poster titled "Sweet & Spicy Cottage Cheese" in large, white, bubbly font against a blue sky background. At the top of the poster, it says "PRODUCERS DAIRY", "CA DAIRY COUNCIL", and "CA BEEF COUNCIL". Below the title, it says "Try this sweet & Spicy Way to enjoy Cottage cheese as a afternoon snack." To the right of this text is a list of ingredients with checkmarks: Cottage Cheese, Fresh Pineapple, Tajin, Low-Sodium, and Pineapple Juice. Below the text is a photo of a black and white cow in a field next to a large pitcher of pinkish liquid. The bottom portion of the image is a photo of a young girl with dark hair, wearing a blue floral dress, smiling and holding two educational materials: a "MyPlate" diagram and a "FARM-TO-SCHOOL" brochure. She is standing next to a brown cow in a blue metal enclosure.

HOARD'S DAIRYMAN

Why dairy access matters more than ever

Oct. 6 2025

By Amy DeLisio, Dairy Council of California



Across the country, families and students are losing access to a critical nutrition education program. Due to federal funding cuts, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education (SNAP-Ed) nutrition education and obesity prevention grant, known in California as CalFresh Healthy Living, is ending after 30 years. This change impacts hundreds of organizations, including schools, local health departments, and community-based partners that deliver nutrition education, help families stretch limited food dollars, and support healthy food environments. This setback comes alongside changes to SNAP eligibility rules that may increase food insecurity for vulnerable families.

These programs are vital for children and families connecting them to hands-on nutrition education, shopping tools to stretch limited food dollars and gardening skills, and working together to increase access to healthy foods. In fact, one in five Americans have uncertain or inconsistent access to food. Consistent and equitable access to healthy, safe, and culturally relevant and affordable foods is essential for optimal health and well-being. Food security has been associated with positive physical, cognitive, and emotional health outcomes, including better management of chronic diseases, optimal growth and development, decreased stress, and other benefits.

This is especially crucial for pregnant women and young children, when proper nutrition sets the foundation for healthy growth, brain development, and lifelong wellness.

Federal nutrition assistance programs fill a critical gap in helping families put healthy food on the table including move access to dairy foods. Milk, yogurt, and cheese are important because of their unique package of nutrients that support health at every age. They provide high-quality nutrients and are accessible, affordable, and culturally relevant for a diverse population. A wide variety of dairy foods meet people's unique needs and remain a valued part of food traditions while ensuring nutritional adequacy.

As the health and nutrition policy landscape continues to shift, the dairy community plays an important role in promoting and educating decision makers on the benefits of federal nutrition assistance programs and the central role that milk and dairy foods play in these programs and Americans' health. The loss of SNAP-Ed underscores the need for collective action to fill gaps in nutrition education and healthy food access. By working together through strategic partnerships, community engagement and education, we can help ensure that science-based nutrition messages continue reaching children and families, especially those with limited food budgets. Together, we can build on dairy's legacy of nourishing healthier communities and supporting equitable access to nutrient-rich foods.

Learn more about how you can join Dairy Council of California in this effort by visiting DairyCouncilofCA.org.

To comment, email your remarks to intel@hoards.com.

(c) Hoard's Dairyman Intel 2025

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Well-nourished, Brighter Futures: Dairy Dialogue

Author(s): S. Young, A. DeLisio, A. McClelland; Dairy Council of California

Learning Outcome: Describe how cross-sector dialogue fosters solutions for nourishing, sustainable school meals, and identify key challenges and opportunities school nutrition professionals face in meeting regulations and diverse student needs.

Background: Nutrient-dense school meals are essential for student health and academic success, yet many children underconsume key nutrients such as calcium, vitamin D, and potassium. To address this, Dairy Council of California launched a multi-phase initiative culminating in Well-Nourished, Brighter Futures: Dairy Dialogue, convening school nutrition leaders, dairy processors, students, and health experts.

Methods: An advisory council guided planning and key informant interviews were conducted with school nutrition directors and dairy processors to identify barriers and opportunities related to dairy in school meals. Insights informed the January 2025 event agenda, which utilized the “What, So What, Now What” reflective framework. Pre- and post-event surveys, group discussions, and written reflections captured participant feedback.

Results: Participants identified five focus areas: culturally responsive dairy-based meals, student engagement in food service, sustainability, comprehensive nutrition education, and multi-sector collaboration. Survey data revealed 100% of post-event respondents found the connections and strategies gained beneficial for future work. Advocacy opportunities emerged to enhance school meal reimbursement policies, ensuring the continued provision of high-quality, locally sourced foods.

Conclusion: The Dairy Dialogue demonstrated the power of cross-sector collaboration to reimagine dairy’s role in school meals. Future efforts will prioritize youth involvement, evidence-based nutrition education, and community-driven advocacy to sustain momentum. Continued investment in inclusive, collaborative dialogue is vital to creating nourishing, equitable, and sustainable school meal programs that promote lifelong health and student success. This structured dialogue offers a collaborative blueprint for improving nutrition equity and sustainability in school meal programs.

Funding Source: Funding for this project was through the Dairy Council of California and California Cattle Council, an agricultural marketing program under the authority of California Department of Food and Agriculture.