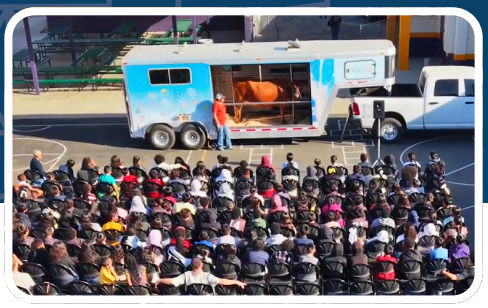
DAIRY COUNCIL OF CALIFORNIA — EST. 1919 —

Internal Report
Board of Directors and DCC Staff

July-September 2026

Trimester 1 Executive Summary

FY 2026-27 Strategic Success Plan







Laying the Groundwork for a New Strategic Plan

Trimester 1 (T1) is the first reporting period of the Dairy Council of California (DCC) FY 2026–27 Strategic Success Plan. During this trimester, teams built systems, baselines and partnerships that will produce measurable results in Trimester 2 (T2) and Trimester 3 (T3).

The new plan organizes work into three strategies: Dairy Education, Strategic Engagement and Organizational Excellence. Together they hold 25 organization wide Key Results (KRs). These KRs measure outcomes such as knowledge gained, attitudes changed and partnership commitments.

Outcome-based KRs build over the full year. Survey responses, partner actions and benchmarks accumulate across all three trimesters. Therefore, this report shows whether each KR is on pace and what groundwork is in place to achieve strategic objectives.

Reporting period

KR data reflects July 1–Sept. 30, to allow time for collection and review. October activity is noted where relevant. This report reflects a partial T1 snapshot, with final metrics completed on Oct. 31, 2026.

Dairy Education 8 KRs

Strategic Engagement 8 KRs

Organizational Excellence 9 KRs

At a Glance

DCC's direct programs and professional education reached students and professionals across California in T1.

Mobile Dairy Classroom (MDC)

57,880 students reached, in person

2,536 students reached, virtually

580 Ag Day and community events reached

Educator Net Promoter Score
MDC (N=56)
+69
Target: +55 or higher

MDC assembly satisfaction 95%
in-person and virtual Target 90%

590 Core resource orders and downloads

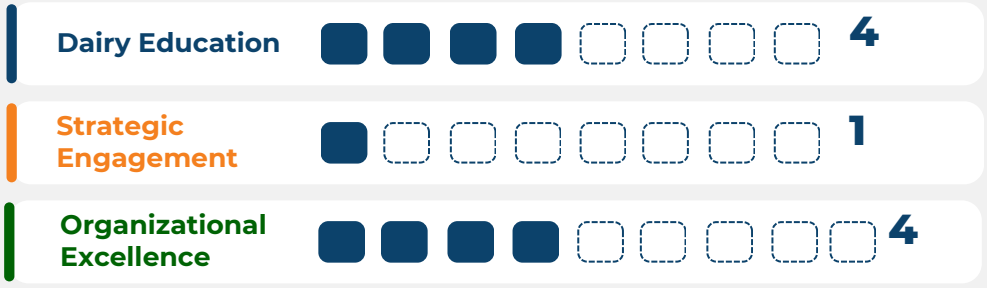
$99.44K In-kind support secured

Key Result pacing by strategy

Few KRs are expected to show results in T1 because most are measuring outcomes collected over the full year. The chart below shows where each strategy stands.



9 on track **16** groundwork



On track: T1 results meet or exceed the expected pace

Groundwork underway: results expected in T2 or T3

For all 25 KRs, the language, targets and measures are in the **FY 2026–27 Strategic Success Plan**.

What participants are saying

Global questions are standard survey items that DCC asks the same way across programs so results can be combined and compared. In T1, they show that DCC programs are changing what participants know and value about dairy.

Percentage reporting an increase

90%
Dairy nutrition knowledge
Professional education attendees (N=92)
2.80 → 4.58
Average before and after (1-5)

74%
Dairy nutrition value
Professional education attendees (N=81)
3.23 → 4.81
Average before and after (1-5)

87%
Confidence in advocating for dairy
Professional education attendees (N=15)
Before and after averages not applicable

90%
Dairy agricultural and nutrition knowledge
MDC virtual field trip educators (N=58)
3.03 → 4.25
Average before and after (1-5)

Strategy 1 of 3

Dairy Education

4 of 8
KRs on track

T1 in brief

Dairy Education opened the year with quality scores above target and the systems needed to measure knowledge gains at scale.

Objectives

1. Increase knowledge and value of dairy nutrition and agriculture.
2. Expand the reach and adoption of DCC's evidence-based core resources.
3. Deliver dairy education through innovative and engaging formats.

T1 highlights

Partners and educators report real learning gains

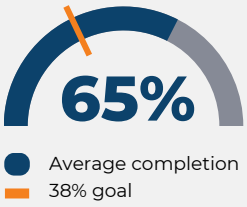
8 in 10 key sector partners

80% reported increased knowledge (86 partners)

9 in 10 virtual field trip educators

90% reported increased knowledge (58 educators)

Of the key sector partners who rated their knowledge before and after a DCC session, 80% (86 partners) reported an increase. So did 90% of virtual field trip educators (58 educators).



Core resource video holds viewers' attention.

The average video completion rate reached 65%, above the 38% goal.

New format reaches educators at the California State Fair

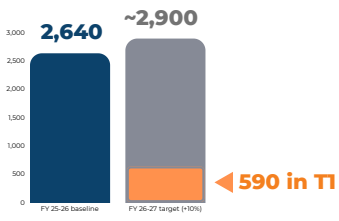
about **100** attendees

DCC co-hosted a student culinary competition. DCC board member Mike Newell from HP Hood LLC served as a judge.

Groundwork for T2 and T3

Baselines are set

Core resources reached 2,640 orders and downloads in FY 2025–26, setting a 10% growth target of about 2,900 for FY 2026–27.



Four new or modernized resources are in development

DCC committed to a new Discover Dairy Classroom assembly, launching a newly developed online nutrition- and dairy-centered learning game and modernized versions of two health professional handouts on healthy eating during pregnancy and for children.



Looking to T2

Mobile Dairy Classroom knowledge results will increase, and end-user testing of new educational tools will begin. The first core resource video (*Farm-to-You*) and *The Great Food Quest* completion data will be reported.

Spotlight: Dairy Education campaign

World School Milk Day and Unsung Heroes



2,536 students drawn to Mobile Dairy Classroom's virtual field trip, the highest attended to date

The signature collaboration paired DCC's school nutrition relationships with the California Milk Processor Board's "Got Milk?" creative platform. It recognized 38 school nutrition Unsung Heroes statewide. Personalized posters celebrated cafeteria, delivery and custodial staff whose work often happens behind the scenes.

The campaign is the first of three annual campaigns under Dairy Education and the first evaluated through a cross-unit impact report.

11,250 +
Students reached through campaign posters

9,982
Farm-to-You sheets distributed

4,200
Farm-to-You milk video views

38
Unsung Hero recognitions statewide

3,316
Landing page visits with **201** toolkit downloads

9,910
Press release views with **1,841** unique readers

$95,000
Estimated California Milk Processor Board in-kind partnership value



Recognition becomes a vehicle for education

At Alice Shaw Elementary in Santa Maria, California, KSBY-TV covered a celebration featuring school nutrition employees, the Mobile Dairy Classroom and the DCC–California Milk Processor Board partnership. Partners extended the message as well: Districts, fairgrounds and agricultural groups shared at least 10 recognition posts on their own channels.

Why it matters

For the first time, a campaign's activations, impressions, toolkit use and message pull-through are captured in one organizational summary report. The same model will apply to two additional campaigns, National Nutrition Month and June Is Dairy Month, in T3.

- World School Milk Day — **Complete in T1**
- National Nutrition Month — T3
- June is Dairy Month — T3

Strategy 2 of 3

Strategic Engagement

1 of 8
KRs on track

T1 in brief

Strategic Engagement shifted professional education from volume to depth in T1. Early survey results show professionals leaving events more confident to advocate for dairy than before attending. The next step is to collect that measure at every session.

Objectives

1. Change attitudes and inspire actions to advance dairy.
2. Cultivate partnerships around shared values.
3. Activate opinion leaders to elevate dairy's position.

T1 highlights

Professionals leave ready to advocate

Ten professional education sessions reached more than 560 professionals. The largest sessions focused on school meals and farm-to-school.

560+
professionals in 10 sessions

230 attendees reached in **A workshop on dairy's role in farm-to-school** at Lodi Unified School District

125 attendees reached in A School Nutrition Association national conference session titled **"United for Impact-Powered by Partnerships"**

8 other sessions
~205 attendees combined

Each segment is attendance for that session; the remaining eight sessions make up the rest of the 560+

T1 stories



DCC research reached a national nutrition audience

DCC led two posters at the Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior 2026 Annual Conference, one analyzing WIC participation among 1- to 4-year-olds and the other sharing results from a community nutrition initiative that gave caregivers of young children access to digital vouchers to purchase diverse dairy foods.

Pictured: Amy DeLisio and Ashley Rosales presenting at the SNEB 2026 poster session.

Leaders are stepping up

A Huntington Beach Union High School District foodservice director co-presented with DCC on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2025-2030.

Faculty are building dairy science into coursework

At a professor's request, DCC summarized recent dairy and cardiometabolic research to update a San Diego City College nutrition course.

Groundwork for T2 and T3

10 of 40

Engagement model sharpens

While DCC held 62 professional education engagements in FY 2025–26, this year's KR caps engagements at 40 with a stronger strategic focus—and asks **1,000** professionals to report on their confidence in advocating for dairy. Ten sessions in T1 use 25% of the cap.

6 of 10

Measurement is built into sessions

Six of the 10 professional engagement sessions in T1 included global questions so attendee responses feed directly into the KRs.

FY 25-26 - 39,260

Target- 47,112

+20%

HubSpot contact growth has a baseline

DCC reached 39,260 engaged, influenced contacts in FY 2025–26. This year's target is **47,112, a 20% increase**, by the end of the fiscal year. Influenced contacts are new or existing contacts who have interacted with at least one asset tied to a specific marketing campaign.

T1 T2 T3

Baselines in T3

The annual partner survey is in development

The Data and Impact unit is designing the survey that will set baselines for favorable dairy attitudes and DCC as a trusted source in T3.

Looking to T2

Key metrics through survey responses will be coming in. Co-hosted events with partners and leader activations are expected to be aggregated.

Building momentum into T3



Mobile Dairy Classroom at the Salute to Ag Annual UC Davis Football Game, September 26, 2026, in Davis, CA.



Welcoming DCC's newest board member, Jennifer Soliz, as she joined us for an MDC at a school in Fresno, CA.



Co-presenting with educators at the Wellness Conference to discuss dairy nutrition and opportunities to support healthier school communities.

Strategy 3 of 3

Organizational Excellence

4 of 9
KRs on track

T1 in brief

Organizational Excellence put DCC's new accountability system into practice in T1, and DCC's work appeared in trusted industry and health outlets. The board and dairy community were directly involved.

Objectives

1. Demonstrate DCC's visibility as a trusted dairy nutrition leader.
2. Foster a high-performing, engaged team.
3. Increase board engagement and dairy community support.

T1 highlights

3 Policy contributions

DCC brought science to policy conversations from California to the global stage

Dept. of Health Care Services
DCC submitted comments to the California Department of Health Care Services supporting the inclusion of dairy in medically tailored meals.

Dept. of Food and Agriculture
DCC also recommended that California Department of Food and Agriculture allow lactose-free milk and kefir in its Farm to School Incubator Grant Program.

International Dairy Federation
DCC added dairy nutrition research to the International Dairy Federation's briefing paper to the World Health Organization.

7/7 units completed T1 KR check-ins

By mid-September, each unit reviewed its KR contributions with the Data and Impact unit and documented its progress.

DCC's work appears in trusted outlets, reaching 8,146+ readers.

Four publications carried DCC content: a California Academy of Physician Associates magazine feature on DCC's Food as Health leadership, a Food as Health insert in *Hoard's Dairyman*, an article on dairy in school meals in *Cheese Market News* and an article on milk options in the California School Nutrition Association *Poppy Seeds* journal.

Partners are talking about DCC.

DCC's Dairy Dialogue manuscript was highlighted by the California Dairy Research Foundation and the California Milk Advisory Board. A district foodservice director and the Orange County Nutrition and Physical Activity Collaborative partner newsletter also recognized DCC's work.

Board members carry DCC's message to industry audiences.

Board member and dairy farmer Brad Scott contributed to the *Hoard's Dairyman* insert and was interviewed on The *Hoard's Dairyman* Podcast. Board member Arlene VanderEyk collaborated with DCC on talking points for a *School Nutrition Association* magazine interview on farm-to-school, covering the California school milk landscape and highlighting DCC's education resources.

Dairy community stakeholders are engaged.

175 Ask a Farmer participants

75 Fuel the Future attendees

Dairy farmer Anthony Agueda answered visitor questions at DCC's Ask a Farmer activation during Ag Day at the California State Fair (175 participants). A dairy community stakeholder joined legislators and staff at Fuel the Future, co-hosted at the California State Capitol by DCC, California Cattle Council and California Beef Council (75 attendees).

Groundwork for T2 and T3

DCC is setting up a process for units to identify and report cost-saving and income-contributing efforts toward goals.

Looking to T2

Key metrics through survey responses will be coming in. Co-hosted events with partners and leader activations are expected to be aggregated.



Ask a Farmer exhibit at the California State Fair Agricultural Day Showcase on July 18, 2026

Looking Ahead

The foundation laid in T1 will continue to build in T2, expanding reach and strategic outcomes.

Year-end results will be reported across all **25 KRs**

T2 priorities (November-January)

- Count Mobile Dairy Classroom educator knowledge results alongside virtual field trip results to make progress toward the 900-educator goal.
- Begin end-user testing of new nutrition education tools and report the first educator Net Promoter Score (NPS) for those tools.
- Include the global question on confidence in advocating for dairy foods in every professional education survey to reach 1,000 responses.
- Increase core resource orders and downloads to return to pace on the 2,904 target.
- Complete co-hosted partner events and secure the first leader activations and Food as Health partnership commitments.

T3 priorities

- Annual partner survey
- Two campaigns
- Food as Health Initiative

"As farmers, we take our responsibility seriously to provide wholesome, healthy farm-to-table products while helping consumers better understand how farmers care for their animals and make nutritious foods available to families and communities."
- **Brad Scott, 4th-generation dairy farmer, Scott Brothers Dairy**
Hoard's Dairyman Insert

DAIRY COUNCIL OF CALIFORNIA — EST. 1919 —

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— EST. 1919 —

DAIRY COUNCIL OF CALIFORNIA

FY 2026–27

Strategic Success Plan

Our guiding document for the fiscal year — what we plan to accomplish, how we will measure it, and why it matters.

FOR INTERNAL USE ONLY

■ **Dairy Education** ■ **Strategic Engagement** ■ **Organizational Excellence**

5 STRATEGY AREAS

Dairy Council of California advances its purpose through three interconnected strategies. Together, they trace a deliberate arc from building knowledge and value, to shifting attitudes and inspiring action, to strengthening DCC's credibility and capacity.



All three strategies are activated across the Dairy Industry, Education and Healthcare sectors

DAIRY EDUCATION

Advance effective learning solutions through trusted dairy nutrition science.

OBJECTIVES

- Increase knowledge and value of dairy nutrition and agriculture.
- Expand the reach and adoption of DCC's evidence-based core resources.
- Deliver dairy education through modern and engaging formats.

SAMPLE ACTIVITIES

- Mobile Dairy Classroom (MDC) and Farm Tours
- PBS The Great Food Quest release in San Bernardino County
- Pregnancy and Family nutrition education resources modernization
- Partnerships with California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) – Office of Farm to Form, CA Farm to School (F2S), and California Foundation for Ag in the Classroom
- Exploring opportunities for older youth engagement
- Replacement of the online MyPlate Match

STRATEGIC ENGAGEMENT

Advance dairy through relationships & systems-level influence.

OBJECTIVES

- Change attitudes and inspire actions to advance dairy.
- Cultivate partnerships around shared values.
- Activate opinion leaders to elevate dairy's position.

SAMPLE ACTIVITIES

- Trends and Healthy Eating Table publications amplification across communication channels
- Professional education on the health benefits of dairy at all fat levels across WIC, CACFP, school meals and health professionals to influence dairy expansion
- Develop Food as Health Initiative, pairing dairy with fruits, vegetables and whole grains
- Monitor ultra-processed food policies and provide scientific resources on the value of dairy
- Position dairy as a key element of Food is Medicine, leveraging the new Dietary Guidelines for Americans

ORGANIZATIONAL EXCELLENCE

Advance our purpose through a strong, resilient and sustainable organization.

OBJECTIVES

- Demonstrate DCC's visibility as a trusted dairy nutrition leader.
- Foster a high-performing, engaged team.
- Increase board engagement and dairy community support.

SAMPLE ACTIVITIES

- Modernize nutrition education tools, philosophy and formats
- Establish an external funding strategy to support long-term sustainability
- Continued presence in industry and agriculture publications, meetings and podcasts/webinars
- Greater visibility through a conference and meeting strategy
- Expand collaboration with the board and the dairy community

6 KEY SECTORS & PRIORITY AUDIENCES

Through a variety of pathways, Dairy Council of California aims to create the greatest value, outcomes and impact to ultimately build healthier communities. Our work is concentrated across three primary sectors.

Sector	Key Audiences
Dairy Industry	Dairy farm families, milk processors, dairy boards and associations at the state, national and international level
Education	School foodservice professionals, teachers (K–8 focus), school nutrition directors, the California Department of Education (CDE), the School Nutrition Association (SNA), CDFA/Farm to School, CA Foundation for Ag in the Classroom, the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP), 4-H, FFA, youth
Healthcare	Registered Dietitians, physicians, physician assistants, public health professionals, WIC, CACFP, the California Academy of Physician Associates (CAPA), the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), the California Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (CAND)/Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (AND), health professional students.

Priority Life Stages

First 1,000 Days	Early Childhood	School Age	Mid to Older Adults
Pregnancy through Caregivers and 0–2	Ages 2-8	Elementary, Middle & High School Ages 9-18	Healthy Aging Ages 40-65+






9 OUR SUCCESS PLAN – OKR FRAMEWORK

Dairy Council of California implements an Objectives and Key Results (OKR) framework to measure what matters most in achieving our purpose. OKRs are a disciplined, focused framework—purpose-driven, designed to align resources to strategic areas with the highest impact and built to strengthen trust internally and externally.

> Standardized Global Questions—consistent, Likert-based survey items deployed across programs—link directly back to specific Key Results (KRs), so individual education sessions and partner interactions roll up into organization-wide measures of knowledge, value and attitude change, ultimately inspiring action. Results are reported each trimester (T1, T2, T3) against named data sources.
>
> **T1:** July - October | **T2:** November - February | **T3:** March - June

Strategy Overview + Key Milestones by Trimester

Strategy	Trimester 1	Trimester 2	Trimester 3
Dairy Education	✓ Launch campaign workgroup ✓ Deploy Global Questions (Alchemer) ✓ The Great Food Guest ✓ World School Milk Day activation	✓ Trends launch + webinar + video series ✓ Resource evaluations (NPS tracking) ✓ 4+ delivery formats active ✓ Core resource video tracking (≥38%)	✓ 3 campaigns complete ✓ 4 core resources new/revised ✓ 10% reach increase vs FY25-26 ✓ 500 end users tested tools (NPS ≥55)
Strategic Engagement	✓ Baseline surveys deployed ✓ FaH workgroup launched (Sonia leads) ✓ Environmental scan in progress ✓ Opinion leader outreach begins	✓ 2 co-hosted events completed ✓ Food as Health partnerships in progress ✓ Trends amplification activations ✓ 3rd-party endorsement tracking	✓ 1,000 professionals surveyed ✓ 30% report increased confidence ✓ 4 federal education activities ✓ 2 FaH partnerships committed ✓ Annual partner survey baseline
Organizational Excellence	✓ T1 staff pulse survey (D&I) ✓ Board meeting + interactive activity ✓ OKR check-in T1 documented ✓ Identify cost-saving opportunities	✓ T2 pulse survey ✓ Board meeting + activity ✓ OKR check-in T2 ✓ ≥2 dairy community touchpoints	✓ Annual partner survey (OE baseline) ✓ 25 trusted leader references ✓ $100K cost-saving/income goal ✓ 80% board attendance

10 MEASURING OUR IMPACT

Dairy Council of California measures success across two tracks: internal (culture, alignment and accountability) and external (impact on the people and communities we serve). Together, these tracks tell the full story of organizational performance and program effectiveness.

Internal Measurement – Culture, Alignment & Accountability

Objectives and Key Results (OKRs)

Our OKR framework is a disciplined, focused program approach that is both intentional and necessary. OKRs:

- **Are purpose-driven** – anchored to our vision and strategic priorities
- Align resources to strategic areas with the highest impact
- Strengthen trust internally and externally
- Position DCC to continue serving Californians effectively

Staff Pulse Surveys

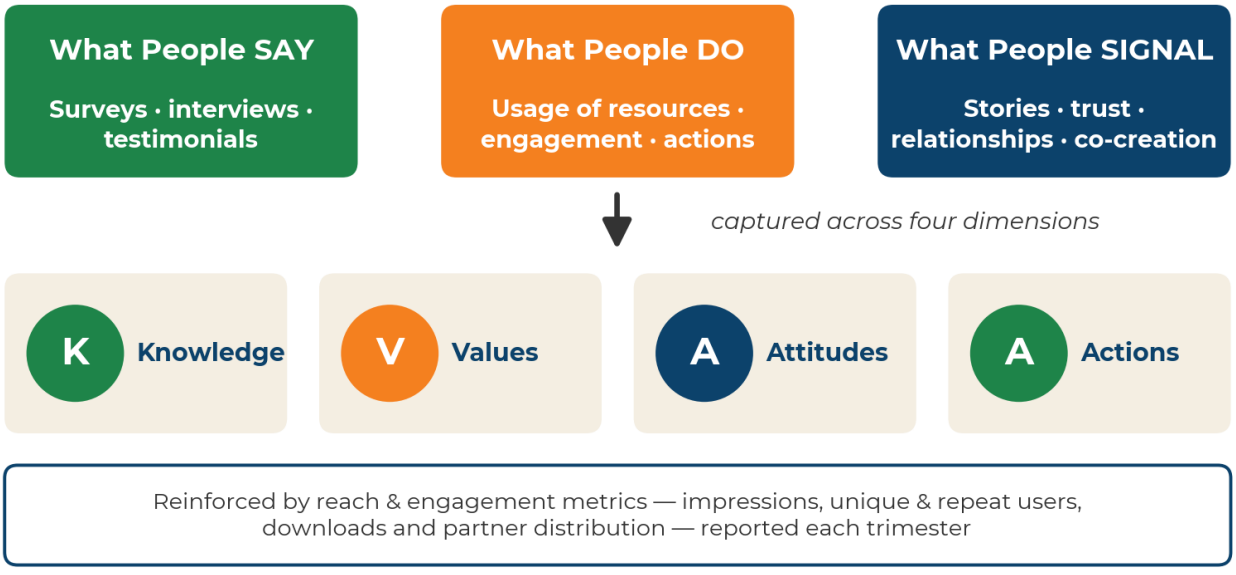
Administered each trimester to measure trust, communication and engagement org-wide. Minimum 75 percent staff completion rate required.

Performance Reviews

Individual accountability measures aligned to organizational priorities and strategy execution.

External Measurement – Impact Framework

Dairy Education and Strategic Engagement are measured externally through an impact framework organized around three evidence types, captured across four dimensions—Knowledge, Values, Attitudes and Actions (KVAA)—reinforced by reach and engagement metrics (impressions, unique and repeat users, downloads and partner distribution) reported each trimester.



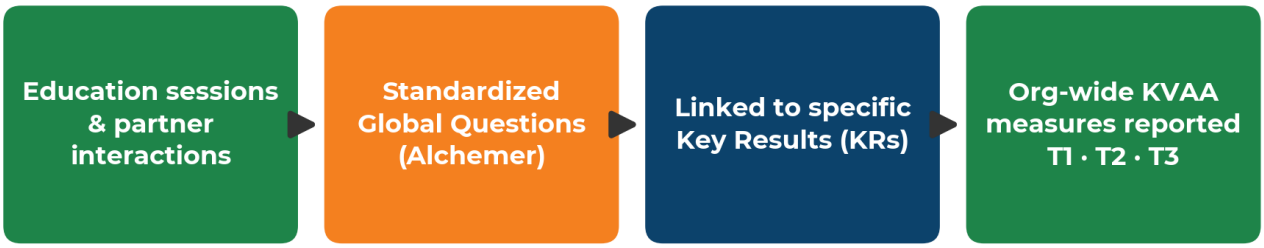
Dimension	What We Track
Knowledge	Daily consumption (3x/day), bone health, brain health, gut health and dairy agriculture (farm-to-table, cow care, MDC).
Values	Primarily Health, Economic, Cultural and Institutional value of dairy and of DCC. Environmental value is de-emphasized in this cycle.
Attitudes	Support for dairy at all fat levels and with small amounts of added sugar; support for dairy in nutrition programs and standards; narrative/trust-building.
Actions	Bridging attitudes into individual and institutional action, tracked via annual surveys, CRM and partnership data.

Strategy-to-Dimension Alignment

Strategy	Primary KVAA Dimensions
Dairy Education	Knowledge, Values
Strategic Engagement	Values, Attitudes, Actions
Organizational Excellence	Supports all dimensions internally and industry partnerships

11 GLOBAL QUESTIONS

Global questions are standardized survey items in Alchemer that allow Dairy Council of California to collect consistent, comparable data across programs and partners. Organized by the four evaluation dimensions, they provide a direct line of sight from individual education sessions to organization-wide outcome measurement. Each question connects to one or more Key Results.



A direct line of sight from individual sessions to organization-wide outcome measurement

KNOWLEDGE | *Measures knowledge of dairy nutrition and agriculture; evaluates what someone knows or learned.*

Question	Response Type	KR Connection
Thinking back to before this learning opportunity, how would you rate your knowledge of dairy nutrition? And how would you rate it now?	Numerical Scale · before/after columns	DE 1.1, 1.2
Thinking back to before this learning opportunity, how would you rate your knowledge of dairy agriculture? And how would you rate it now?	Numerical Scale · before/after columns	DE 1.1, 1.3
Dairy foods are a good source of protein and calcium for strong bones.	Likert Scale	DE 2.1
Dairy foods provide iodine, which is especially important during pregnancy and early childhood for brain development.	Likert Scale	DE 1.1, 1.2
Fermented dairy foods like yogurt and cheese can support gut health.	Likert Scale	DE 1.1, 1.3

VALUES | *Measures perceived value or importance of dairy and trust and credibility of DCC.*

Question	Response Type	KR Connection
Thinking back to before this learning opportunity, how valuable did you find learning about California dairy agricultural practices that produce milk and dairy foods? And how valuable do you find it now?	Numerical Scale · before/after columns	DE 1.1 · 1.2
I value partnering with Dairy Council of CA to support healthy eating in our community.	Likert Scale	SE 2.1 · 2.2 · 3.1, OE 1.2
Dairy is a naturally nutrient-rich food.	Likert Scale	DE 1.1 · 1.3
Dairy offers good nutritional value for the price.	Likert Scale	DE 1.1 · 1.3

ATTITUDES | *Measures shifts in beliefs about dairy, including action-oriented attitudes such as willingness to advocate or recommend.*

Question	Response Type	KR Connection
Thinking back to before this learning opportunity, how strongly did you agree that dairy foods at all fat levels can be part of a healthy eating pattern? And how strongly do you agree now?	Numerical Scale · before/after columns	SE 2.1
I will use or share Dairy Council of California's resources (e.g., curriculum, handouts, digital tools) with my students/clients/community.	Likert Scale	DE 2.1

As a result of this session, my confidence in advocating for dairy foods has:	Likert Scale	SE 1.2
I feel confident supporting dairy's role within federal nutrition programs to the audiences I serve.	Likert Scale	SE 1.2

EXPERIENCE | *Measures customer satisfaction and quality of content or program; includes NPS questions.*

Question	Response Type	KR Connection
The format of today's activity was engaging and effective for learning.	Likert Scale	DE 3
How likely are you to recommend DCC's dairy nutrition education resources to a colleague or peer?	NPS 0-10 Scale	DE 1.2 · 2.1
Overall, how satisfied are you with DCC's programs, resources, and services?	NPS 0-10 Scale	DE 1.2 · 2.1

AUDIENCE | *Collects background and segmentation data to contextualize findings across partner types and populations served.*

Question	Response Type	KR Connection
Which of the following best describes your primary professional role or sector?	Multiple choice (single select): K-12 Education, Early Childhood, Healthcare, Foodservice & Culinary, Academia, Dairy Industry, Community/Public Health, Other	N/A
Which populations do you primarily serve in your professional work? (Select all that apply)	Multiple choice (multi-select): Prenatal & early childhood, Children K-5, Middle/High school, Adults and families, Older adults, Other	N/A
Would you like to receive updates and newsletters from Dairy Council of California?	Yes/No · Provide email address	SE 3.2



KNOW WHY MILK MATTERS

BRINGING MORE MILK OPTIONS BACK TO SCHOOLS

By Shannan D. Young, MS, RDN, CAE, SNS, Dairy Council of California

As a registered dietitian starting my work in school nutrition in the mid-1990s, I personally observed the transition that eliminated whole milk and 2% milk from school cafeterias under the 2010 Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act. For over a decade, students had access only to fat-free or 1% milk. The Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act, signed into law in January 2026, and the final rule to expand milk options in child nutrition programs, in effect as of June 8, 2026, permits schools to once again offer 2% and whole milk. Affected programs include the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), the School Breakfast Program (SBP), the Child and Adult Care Food Program, the Special Milk Program, afterschool snacks through NSLP, preschool meals under NSLP and SBP, competitive foods sold in schools, and the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP). Importantly, this is not a mandate. It gives districts the flexibility to make higher-fat milk available based on their own operational considerations, including cost, product availability and student preference and nutritional needs.

This shift is grounded in evolving nutrition science. The latest Dietary Guidelines for Americans now includes nutrient-dense dairy foods—milk, yogurt and cheese—across all fat levels as part of a healthy eating pattern. Dairy remains its own food group, with three daily servings recommended per day, starting at age 9, for the nutrients children frequently fall short on: calcium, vitamin D and potassium. Since most students consume most of their dairy at school, expanding milk options has positive nutritional implications for child nutrition.

California school nutrition professionals are curious to learn more about the science behind this change, while some are already on board. In a spring 2026 poll of 381 respondents, conducted by Dairy Council of California, 85% agreed or strongly agreed that dairy foods of all fat levels can be part of a healthy eating pattern, with similarly strong agreement among education professionals (86%) and respondents from health and academic sectors (87%), indicating broad support for dairy's role in healthy diets.

From the Field:

Oakdale Joint Unified School District

Jason Beach, Director of Nutrition Services at Oakdale Joint Unified School District, has already put this dairy flexibility into practice. His district now offers three options during lunch. Beach responded to questions to show how this change was working for him.

Question 1:

What milk options are you currently offering, and what responses have you observed since introducing additional options?

We currently offer three milk options at lunch: 1% white milk, whole white milk and fat-free chocolate milk. Since expanding our offerings to include whole milk, we have seen meaningful shifts in student selection patterns. While overall meal participation has remained relatively stable, the whole milk option has quickly gained traction—within just two months it has captured approximately half, or just under half, of all white milk selections. This indicates a strong and genuine preference among students for this option, even if it has not dramatically altered total participation numbers.

Question 2:

How has implementation been going so far, and what feedback have you received from students, families or staff?

Implementation has gone smoothly overall, though it required some deliberate planning at the outset. Recognizing that we were entering unfamiliar territory in terms of demand, we advised sites to intentionally overestimate their initial orders to ensure no student was turned away during the rollout. From there, we gradually adjusted order quantities downward to align with actual usage patterns. After approximately two months, consumption has leveled off and we now have a clear picture of ongoing demand.

The student response has been one of the most encouraging aspects of this rollout. There has been a noticeable buzz among the student population, with genuine excitement over having a new choice. Many students who drink whole milk at home expressed real appreciation for being able to have that same option at school—it created a sense of familiarity and comfort that resonated with them.

Among staff, there was some understandable hesitation at first, as is natural with any change in operational routine. However, after navigating the first couple of order cycles, staff became comfortable with the new process and fully adapted to incorporating whole milk into their regular workflow.

Parent feedback has been particularly positive. Several families have reached out to express their enthusiasm, with many noting that they consider whole milk to be a healthier choice for their children and are glad to see the district making it available.



The recent regulatory change gives districts the opportunity to explore milk fat flexibility to meet students' nutritional needs while remaining culturally responsive. To learn more about the current science on dairy and child nutrition, listen to Dairy Council of California's recorded "Whole Milk & Dairy in Schools: Supporting Student Health and Success" webinar now available at www.DairyCouncilofCA.org/SchoolNutrition. Additional free resources are also available to support districts and their teams through our School Nutrition Resource Hub. The landing page provides evidence-based nutrition education tools for school foodservice professionals including:

1. A handout on the Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act of 2025 and health benefits of milk for growing children.

2. Let's Eat Healthy: Explore Dairy educational units that include Dairy Council of California's Milk Masterclass Tasting Activity to help students determine which type of milk they like best.

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DAIRY COUNCIL OF CALIFORNIA — EST. 1919 —

Summer 2026

News Update

A Message From the CEO

Food as Health: An Opportunity to Lead



Healthcare professionals, educators and community leaders are looking for innovative ways to improve health outcomes as rates of chronic disease continue to rise. As a result, "Food as Health" is gaining momentum as a proactive, approachable framework that aims to inspire healthy eating patterns through everyday food choices that are enjoyable, accessible and culturally relevant.

Food as Health presents an opportunity to align dairy nutrition science and natural fit into diverse cultures, cuisines and eating styles with practical solutions that help people build lasting habits for dairy foods. Dairy Council of California is helping advance Food as Health by translating nutrition science into practical education, developing culturally relevant resources and convening partners across healthcare, schools, public health and community organizations to foster collaboration around evidence-based nutrition solutions that are actionable and relevant.

Dairy Council of CA remains committed to furthering solutions that empower healthy eating patterns and support healthier children, families and communities. By bringing trusted nutrition education and building strong partnerships across sectors, we can help create a healthier tomorrow through dairy while strengthening dairy's future.

Sincerely,

Amy DeLisio, MPH, RDN

Stay connected—sign up for Elevated News updates at info@dairycouncilofca.org or scan the QR code.

Dairy is Well Positioned to Advance Food as Health

Dairy foods are well positioned within the Food as Health framework because they are widely available, affordable and adaptable across diverse cultures and cuisines, while providing a unique combination of nutrients, including protein, calcium, vitamins D and B12, and potassium, that support growth, development and overall health across the lifespan.

In schools and communities, milk, yogurt, cheese and other dairy foods can help support healthy eating patterns through meal programs, nutrition education, culinary learning and initiatives that increase access to nutrient-dense, whole foods. As nutrition becomes more integrated into healthcare, dairy can be incorporated into nutrition interventions such as nutrition counseling, food boxes and medically tailored meals that help individuals meet nutrient needs and improve diet quality.

By encouraging the inclusion of dairy foods in everyday food choices, the dairy community can showcase how daily habits and targeted nutrition strategies can create a healthier tomorrow.



Perspective from a California Dairy Farmer

"As farmers, we take our responsibility seriously to provide wholesome, healthy farm-to-table products while helping consumers better understand how farmers care for their animals and make nutritious foods available to families and communities."



– Brad Scott, 4th-generation dairy farmer, Scott Brothers Dairy



FARM-TO SCHOOL WELLNESS

HOW ONE SCHOOL BUILT A YEAR-ROUND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP FOR STUDENT WELLNESS

By Sonia Fernandez Arana, Dairy Council of California & Dr. Kathryn Ridout, MD, PhD, Parent / Psychiatrist, Kaiser Permanente Division of Research

National Farm to School Month is celebrated in October, but Hidden Valley Elementary at Santa Rosa City Schools District shows how farm-to-school can become a year-round strategy for student wellness.

Through a Dairy Council of California Let's Eat Healthy Community Grant, the school fostered a yearlong partnership among school nutrition professionals, educators, parents and local agriculture leaders to connect students with healthy eating, local food systems and the people who produce their food.

Nutrition Education Across the School Community

Using Dairy Council of California's evidence-based nutrition education resources, teachers, parents and school nutrition staff delivered lessons in multiple settings reaching all 530 transitional kindergarten through sixth-grade students.

The district's nutrition services team linked classroom learning to the cafeteria through taste tests, recipe development and menu planning. Students evaluated recipes using their five senses and voted on favorites, leading to three menu additions: yogurt parfaits, zucchini muffins and kale chips.

The school's nutrition team reported increased milk consumption and greater student willingness to try new foods, while parents shared that recipes introduced through the project were being prepared at home.

Bringing the Farm to the School and Students to the Farm

Agricultural literacy experiences further connected nutrition lessons to how food is produced. Students participated in Sonoma County Ag Days, celebrated World School Milk Day with local dairy farmer Jennifer Beretta and a California dairy princess, and visited Beretta Family Dairy during National Dairy Month.

For many students and families, the dairy tour was their first visit to a working dairy farm. Participants toured the dairy, visited the milking parlor and learned about animal care and sustainability practices, including methane reduction and recycled water for irrigation.

For Beretta, a fourth-generation dairy farmer, welcoming students to the family dairy is an extension of a tradition that began generations ago.

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"My grandfather always had an open-door policy here at the dairy, and I'm proud to continue that tradition."

Beretta believes students left with more than memories. "I hope students understand that milk doesn't just come from a carton on the shelf, that it takes hard work and cows they met today." Scan the QR code to learn more about the dairy farm tour partnership.

A Model for Farm-to-School Partnerships

The project's strength was a collaboration beyond the school campus. Co-author Dr. Kathryn Ridout, leadership brought a unique perspective as a psychiatrist, parent and member of Hidden Valley Elementary's Parent Faculty Organization. I worked alongside school nutrition staff, teachers and administrators to expand nutrition education and family engagement.

Hidden Valley Elementary demonstrates how school nutrition professionals can serve as collaborators and conveners. Teachers, nutrition professionals and parents can work together to lead nutrition education lessons; families can extend learning at home; and community partners can connect students with local agriculture.

"As a registered dietitian, I know nutrition education is essential to every K-12 foodservice program," said Ed Burke, Child Nutrition Services Director for the district. "Strong partnerships between health professionals, school communities and foodservice teams turn abstract ideas about wellness into something real: students choosing nutrient-dense foods that fuel learning, and healthy habits that last a lifetime."

The partnership created lasting change: stronger local school wellness practices, leadership support to sustain the program, expanded family engagement, permanent menu additions, increased milk consumption and broader district interest in nutrition education and school wellness programming.

Farm-to-School Is a Year-Round Opportunity

Hidden Valley Elementary's experience shows that farm-to-school is more than a monthlong celebration. With strong partnerships, students can explore where their food comes from while building lifelong healthy eating patterns.

Schools interested in adopting a similar approach can access Dairy Council of California's free, evidence-based nutrition education and dairy agricultural literacy resources to celebrate National Farm to School Month and beyond. Check out the Farm-to-You: Milk activity sheet to highlight milk's journey from the farm to school at DairyCouncilofCA.org/F2YMilk.

To learn how Dairy Council of California can support your district's farm-to-school initiatives, contact Sonia Fernandez Arana, School Nutrition Program Manager, at sfernandez@dairycouncilofca.org.

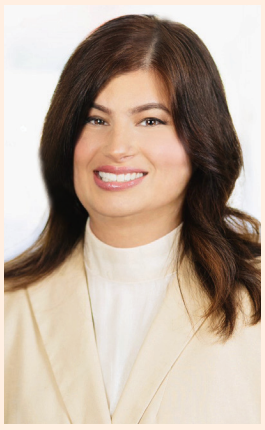
DAIRY COUNCIL OF CALIFORNIA — EST. 1919 —

Fall 2026

News Update

A Message From the CEO

Why School Milk Matters More Than Ever



Milk has long been a familiar part of school meals for generations, nourishing students during the school day and contributing to healthier communities. At the same time, many children still fall short on key nutrients like calcium, vitamin D and potassium, making the role of milk in schools more important than ever.

School milk matters because it ensures students receive essential nutrients critical for growth, development and well-being. At Dairy Council of California, we believe every child should have access to nutritious foods, including milk and dairy, that help meet nutrient needs and support lifelong healthy eating patterns.

This year, schools have more flexibility thanks to The Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act, in effect since June 2026, which expands the milk options schools can offer by allowing whole and reduced-fat 2% milk options in addition to low-fat and fat-free options previously allowed. All types of milk provide the same essential nutrients, and added choice helps schools meet student preferences while upholding nutrition standards.

While access to nutritious foods, including dairy foods, is essential, access alone isn't enough. Nutrition education helps children understand the connection between food and health and empowers them to make informed choices throughout their lives.

With the school year in full swing, we celebrate the dairy farmers, processors, distributors, school nutrition professionals, educators and community partners who help bring milk to students every day. Together, we can elevate health and strengthen schools and thriving communities.

Sincerely,

Amy DeLisio, MPH, RDN, CEO,
Dairy Council of California

Celebrating Milk's Role in Student Health and Success

World School Milk Day, observed on the last Wednesday in September, honors the role school milk programs play in supporting student nutrition, learning and well-being around the world. For this year's observance in late September, Dairy Council of California provided resources to schools highlighting milk's role in nourishing students, including a downloadable toolkit, educational materials, videos and sample social media content to celebrate. These efforts strengthen partnerships and reinforce dairy's role in nourishing future generations.



Educational materials like this poster highlighted essential nutrients in milk and their benefits for growing bodies on World School Milk Day.

Perspective from a California Dairy Farmer

"Knowing that milk from our dairy community helps nourish students is something we take great pride in. Every carton served at school reflects the dedication of farmers, processors, distributors and school nutrition professionals working toward a common goal of elevating children's health. We're encouraged by opportunities that give schools more flexibility to meet the needs of their students while continuing to make milk an important part of the school day."



– Anthony Agueda, Third-Generation Dairy Farmer, Alberto Dairy

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Read more about these topics at **DairyCouncilofCA.org**

Nourishing Students: The Power Of Dairy In School Meals

By: Amy DeLisio, CEO, Dairy Council Of California

August 24, 2026 · 5 Minute Read **Share**

Cheese Market News®

Nourishing Students: The Power Of Dairy In School Meals

By Amy DeLisio, MPH, RDN, CEO, Dairy Council Of California

As millions of students return to classrooms this fall, schools play an important role in supporting children's health and well-being. At a time when concerns about childhood nutrition, food insecurity, and diet-related health conditions continue to grow, school meal programs serve as one of the most effective tools for ensuring children have access to nutrient-dense foods, including dairy foods, every day.

For students of all backgrounds, school breakfast and lunch provide a significant portion of their daily nutrition, helping address nutrient gaps and support healthy growth and development. Research consistently shows that students who participate in school meal programs have higher-quality diets than their peers and consume more nutrient-dense foods, including dairy foods. By providing consistent access to nutritious foods, these programs can help address food and nutrition insecurity while reducing risk of obesity and chronic diseases such as type 2 diabetes and heart disease later in life.

School meals also provide the energy and nutrients needed for cognitive development and classroom performance, contributing to academic success throughout the school year. Additionally, these programs create opportunities to establish healthy eating patterns during children's formative years, when food preferences begin to take shape, supporting long-term health beyond the cafeteria and classroom.

Dairy foods, in particular, play an important role in helping schools meet these goals. Many children do not consume recommended amounts of key nutrients necessary for growth and development, including calcium, vitamin D and potassium found in dairy foods like cheese,

milk and yogurt. As families and educators focus on setting students up for success at the start of the school year, school meal programs that include dairy, fruits, vegetables, and whole grains provide a strong foundation for growth, learning and overall well-being.

Dairy Foods Support Growth, Learning and Development for Schoolchildren

Dairy foods have long been an important component of healthy school meals because they provide a unique package of nutrients that are often under consumed by children.

Cheese, milk and yogurt offer high-quality protein along with calcium, vitamin D, phosphorus and potassium, nutrients that support bone health, growth and overall development. These offerings also help schools meet the needs of increasingly diverse student populations that require support for different nutrient needs, dietary tolerances, preferences and food traditions.

Cheese is beneficial because it is a fermented food that includes probiotics, and studies show that eating these types of foods improve gut health, which is positively linked to overall health and wellness. Additionally, aged cheeses like parmesan, asiago, pecorino romano, cheddar, swiss, gouda and provolone naturally contain less lactose due to the fermentation process, providing more flexibility while delivering the same essential nutrients that developing children need.

Flavored milk and yogurt offered in school meal programs further provide options for dairy consumption. While often containing small amounts of added sugar (10g or less), when consumed as a part of an overall healthy diet, these foods can meet students' preferences while offering the same essential nutrients found in plain dairy foods.

By offering a variety of nutritious foods like dairy in a consistent setting, schools help students build eating patterns that support health and education outcomes inside and outside of the classroom.

Pairing Access with Education Builds Lifelong Healthy Eating Patterns

While access to nutritious foods is essential, access alone is only part of the solution. Nutrition education helps children understand the connection between food and health and empowers them to make informed choices throughout their lives.

Dairy Council of California has long partnered with schools to make nutrition education practical, engaging and relevant for students. Through standards-aligned classroom
culum and professional development resources for educators and school nutrition
essionals, the organization helps students develop food and nutrition literacy skills and

learn how to build healthy eating patterns that include dairy foods. Students explore concepts such as balanced meals, nutrient needs, hydration and the role foods like cheese, milk and yogurt can play in supporting growth and overall health.

Dairy Council of California also partners with schools to increase agricultural literacy. The organization's Mobile Dairy Classroom, California's original farm-to-school agricultural literacy program operating since the 1930s, delivers a live dairy cow and interactive assembly directly to students. The experience helps students understand how milk is produced, where their food comes from and further reinforces how dairy can fit into a healthy eating pattern, creating meaningful connections between agriculture, nutrition and health that are relevant and memorable.

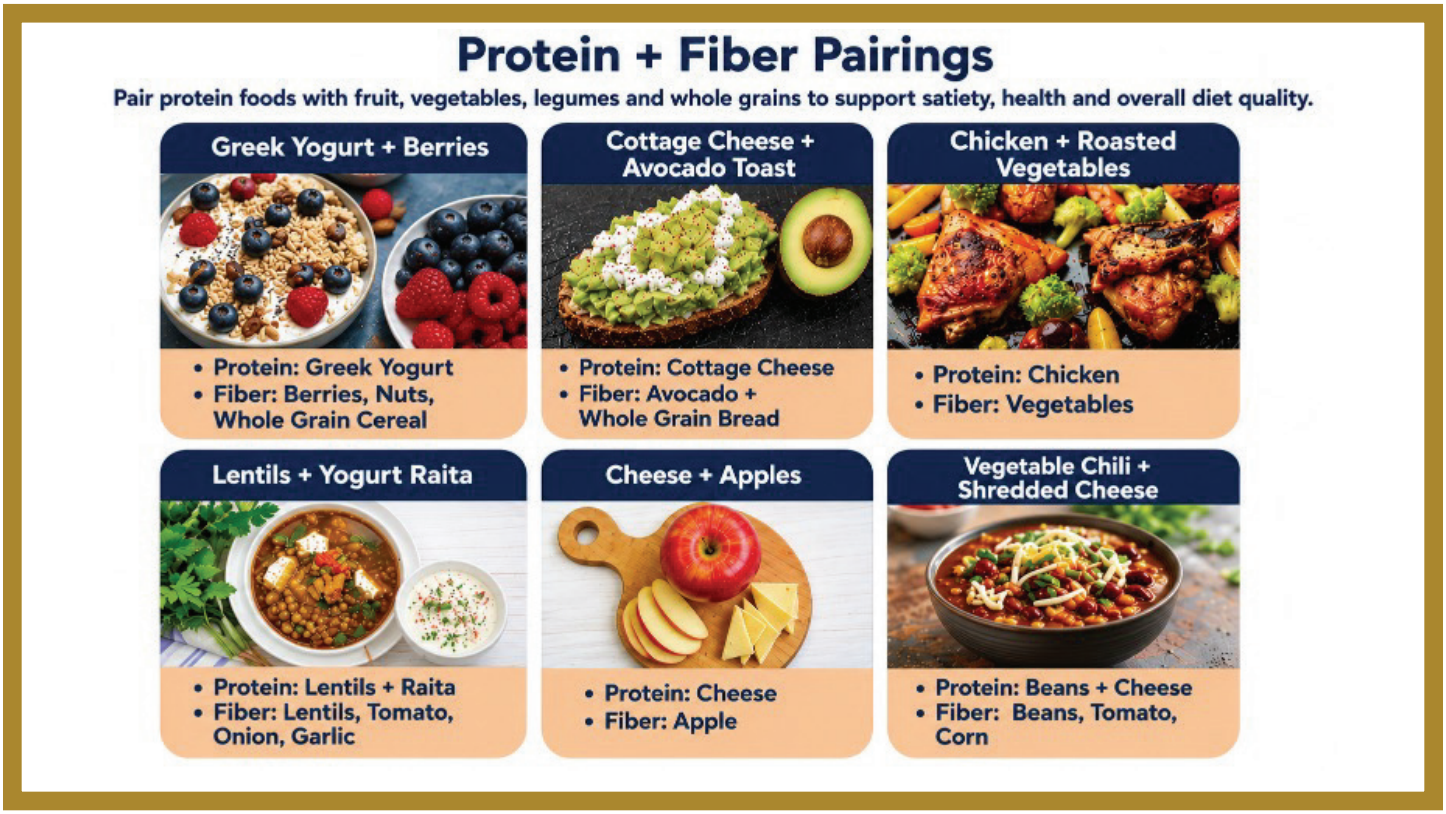
As students head back to school, school nutrition programs remain one of the most powerful opportunities to improve children's health. By providing access to nutrient-dense meals that include dairy foods and pairing those meals with nutrition education, schools help address immediate nutritional needs while laying the groundwork for lifelong healthy habits.

At Dairy Council of California, we believe that every child deserves access to nourishing meals that fuel not only their health, but their potential. For the dairy community, the back-to-school season is an important reminder that dairy foods continue to play a valuable role in helping children grow, learn and thrive. Expanding access to nutritious foods through school meals, strengthening nutrition education and building partnerships among schools, community organizations and agriculture are practical, proven strategies for supporting children's health, but achieving these requires more than a single solution or one sector. It necessitates a collaborative effort across education, health, agriculture and communities. Learn how you can join us to elevate children’s health by visiting **DairyCouncilofCA.org.**

Updates

FROM DIETARY GUIDANCE TO DAILY CHOICES: APPLYING THE 2025–2030 DIETARY GUIDELINES IN CLINICAL PRACTICE

By: Bessie O'Connor, RDN



The 2025–2030 Dietary Guidelines for Americans, released in January 2026, serves as the foundation for federal nutrition programs, public health initiatives and community nutrition education. Despite the important role the Dietary Guidelines plays in shaping federal nutrition programs and public health policy, it is not the primary driver of food choices for most people. National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey data suggest that U.S. dietary patterns, on average, do not closely align with the Dietary Guidelines.[1] This gap highlights that food decisions are shaped by a range of influences including taste, cost and convenience. There is an opportunity to more closely align nutrition education and clinical guidance with these real-world constraints, helping patients move toward healthier eating patterns.

The newest Dietary Guidelines continue to emphasize healthy eating patterns across the lifespan, with increased attention to protein and diet quality. Recommendations for daily protein intake increased from 0.8 grams per kilogram of body weight to 1.2–1.6 grams per kilogram of body weight. For example, a 160-pound person's needs increased from 58 grams to 87–116 grams per day, adjusting based on individual needs. The guidelines maintained the recommendation to limit calories from saturated fat to less than 10% of total daily intake but encourage Americans to choose whole-food sources of saturated fat. These sources include dairy foods, which are recognized across all fat levels as nutrient-dense sources of calcium, vitamin D, potassium and protein that positively impact health. The Dietary Guidelines place greater emphasis on limiting added sugars, especially among children, and recommends minimizing highly processed food intake, while continuing to encourage nutrient-dense foods such as fruits, vegetables and whole grains. MyPlate, the visual depiction of the Dietary Guidelines since 2011, was replaced by a new pyramid, which places less focus

on specific food groups and emphasizes an "eat real food" philosophy.[2]

Changes to the Dietary Guidelines have already had implications for federal nutrition policy. For example, new guidance around dairy fat was a factor in the final rule of the Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act,[3] which expands options for milk fat levels in school meals and other federal nutrition programs. These changes align to research suggesting that whole-fat milk does not contribute to increased adiposity in children.[4,5,6] Studies suggest that the reason may be due to the complex dairy matrix that influences health outcomes rather than looking at isolated nutrients. Tracking the public health implications of these changes to federal meal programs will continue to inform nutrition science and future recommendations.

While the Dietary Guidelines has an impact on federal nutrition policy and food environments, awareness and understanding do not necessarily translate into action. While many Americans are aware of nutrition recommendations, everyday food decisions are often driven more by factors such as taste, cost, convenience, social influences and information encountered on social media than by formal dietary guidance.[7] Even so, many consumers express preferences that align with core Dietary Guidelines principles, like limiting added sugars and choosing more nutrient-dense foods. The challenge appears to be less about understanding what healthy eating looks like and more about overcoming practical barriers to implementing those behaviors.[8]

In this context, the Dietary Guidelines functions less as a prescriptive checklist and more as a framework for moving patients closer to nutritious eating patterns based on their lived experiences. For preventive conversations in clinical settings, this may mean prioritizing brief recommendations that emphasize convenient and budget-friendly ways to support healthy eating patterns. One approach is pairing protein-rich foods (milk, yogurt, cheese, nuts, nut butters, legumes, tuna, eggs, tofu) with fiber-rich foods (fruits, vegetables, whole grains) at meals and snacks.

These foods can be fresh, frozen or canned. Milk and dairy foods are an affordable source of high-quality protein and essential nutrients and pair well with fruits, vegetables and whole grains to maximize nutrition. This strategy translates dietary recommendations into simple advice that supports satiety, nutrient adequacy and overall diet quality while remaining realistic for everyday life.

Health professionals are uniquely positioned to support families in making healthy lifestyle changes through evidence-based nutrition education. By sharing practical, science-based resources and consistent nutrition messages, they can help individuals and families make informed choices that promote lifelong health. Scan the QR code to explore free nutrition education resources for patients and their families.

Healthy Eating for Young Families

Nurturing Healthy Aging

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