



# Midwest Dairy Farmer Survey Feedback – Summary

## Farmer Survey Objectives

In 2021, Midwest Dairy partnered with CRA, Inc. to conduct a farmer communication survey to assess:

- Awareness of and familiarity with the dairy checkoff, perceptions of the benefit of the checkoff, and alignment with business objectives.
- Information perceptions and priorities.
- Preferences for receiving information from Midwest Dairy.
- Willingness to participate in promotional opportunities.
- How perceptions have shifted from 2020.

CRA has worked with DMI and other states and regions on a variety of strategic communications projects over the past 2-3 years and we wanted to capitalize on this expertise and provide insights that could be used across the federation. This is Midwest Dairy's second consecutive year partnering with CRA for our farmer survey.

## Survey Methodology and Participation

All dairy farmers across the Midwest region were invited to participate in the survey via email, e-newsletter announcements, organic and paid social media, mailed invitations and reminders from Farmer Relations representatives. We received over two thousand responses; however, after cleansing the data file to remove non-farmer participants, we received a total of 386 total responses. Of these, 340 of these farmers provided demographic and contact information to be used to update Midwest Dairy's farmer database. Midwest Dairy offered 60 Amazon gift cards as an incentive to complete the survey.

## Feedback About Dairy Checkoff

Overall, **98 percent** of respondents said they were aware of the dairy checkoff, similar to the findings in a farmer survey fielded in 2020. Further, **60 percent** responded that they felt at least somewhat well-informed about the checkoff's priorities and messaging, up six percent compared to 2020 responses. Only **10 percent feel not very informed**, down two percent compared to 2020 responses.

**82 percent** of farmers said they find at least some value in the checkoff, nearly identical to the 2020 level. Favorable farmer feedback included: recognizing checkoff results, benefits, and importance; awareness of advertising and promotion efforts to reach key audiences; value in research into health benefits; see the partnerships developed; and appreciate being informed. Opportunities included wanting a better understanding of how checkoff funds are spent and the ROI, have little awareness of promotion and partnerships, perceive smaller farmers are more isolated from benefits, see little impact in prices, sales, and consumer behavior, and see more benefits to business and processors compared to farmers.



## Communications Preferences -----

- Increasing trust and sales are areas where farmers are most interested in seeing checkoff funds invested. Farmers also ranked these as the most important topics they want to hear more information about.
- Farmers desire transparency on where checkoff funds are spent; details on products, the marketplace, and research and development; efforts to increase sales and promote dairy, especially in schools; and information about consumer perceptions.
- Farmers find Facebook and on-farm visits to be most effective communications tools, while other Midwest Dairy contact (email from representatives, phone calls or texts), in-person meetings, the *Dairy Promotion Update* print publication and *Promotion in Action* are also rated favorably.
- Farmers are less likely to use other social media or virtual meetings or to find them effective.
- Many farmers trust agriculture media as sources for sustainability information (54 percent) and other farmers (40 percent). Agriculture media is trusted heavily by KIF and non-KIF farmers whereas other farmers are trusted more heavily by Corporate and Division farmers.
- 38 percent of respondents trust Midwest Dairy representatives, relatively equally between Corporate, Division, KIF, and non-KIF farmers.
- Nearly 70 percent of farmers chose email as a preferred method for future communication, while nearly 60 percent chose printed materials in the mail. Respondents could choose more than one option, so this reinforces the value of communicating in multiple ways.
- Farmers expressed a desire for more concise communication and a clear understanding of what is available and how to access it.

## Interest in Participating in Dairy Promotion Activities -----

Survey feedback uncovered interest from 323 dairy farmers in becoming more involved in activities promoting dairy from including:

- Giving farm tours
- Speaking at community events
- Visiting school classrooms
- Serving in a leadership position or on the checkoff board
- Contacting local news media or sharing information about dairy farming on social media

Midwest Dairy Farmer Relations program managers will need to confirm the farmers included in the list are Midwest Dairy farmers. After doing so, they will be encouraged to develop a communication strategy to contact these farmers to identify the next steps to capitalize on this interest.

## Implications and Initial Farmer Communications Refinements

Given this feedback from dairy farmers, Midwest Dairy will work toward the following initial improvements in communication to dairy farmers.



### **Increase transparency in how checkoff dollars are invested and farmer/checkoff success stories.**

- Utilize “Making Every Drop Count” branding across all farmer communications.
- Launch *Sustainability in Action* video series, showcasing how Midwest Dairy is wisely investing checkoff dollars into sustainability and research efforts. Videos may showcase what other dairy farmers are doing to further sustainability practices on their dairy farms.
- Encourage Midwest Dairy staff to submit regular stories that will be utilized in Checkoff at Work, Promotion in Action, and Dairy Promotion Update communications. Topics will focus on what dairy farmers have indicated their most interested in learning about, including our efforts to grow trust and increase sales.
- Measure communication effectiveness regularly, including QR surveys in Dairy Promotion Update and post-event surveys.



### **Offer information in obtainable, ‘bite sized’ pieces that farmers can consume where they are.**

- Simplify communication efforts, especially with print pieces. Shorten Annual Report to be more concise and produce Dairy Promotion Update twice per year instead of quarterly.
- Research and potentially pilot a dairy farmer texting program in which timely, relevant updates will be text to farmers.
- Increase efforts to share the new Metrics Scorecard, including breaking it into videos and infographics that can be shared regularly in email and social media updates. Continue highlighting the Metrics Scorecard at all in-person events to maximize the opportunity for live discussions.
- Double down on grassroots public relations efforts.
- Continue posting relevant Facebook updates about checkoff programs, partnerships and results for easy sharing



### **Extend communications to reach a broader group of dairy farmers.**

- Add more farmer e-mails and cell phone numbers to our database.
- Identify ways to involve more farmers who have expressed interest in engaging with checkoff.
- Refocus and reinforce the importance of board members being involved in sharing checkoff news.