



Dairy CARES Report

July 2008

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‘Sustainability’: It’s the new watchword, but what does it really mean?

In both the halls of government and the halls of business, “sustainability” has become an increasingly common word. A Google search these days will return about 33 million hits, reflective of the fact that in less than 20 years, “sustainability” has achieved the status of a movement.

In that time “sustainability” has evolved from a term most likely to be heard coming from Birkenstock-wearing undergrads at the college coffee shop to one that is heard in boardrooms of Fortune 100 companies, including giants like General Electric, Starbucks and Wal-Mart. Few companies worth their Wall Street salt dare to report to stockholders these days without devoting at least a few paragraphs to their corporate sustainability efforts.

But what is it?

The most common “official” definition comes from the Bruntland Report, prepared by the World Commission on Environment and Development and presented at a United Nations Conference in 1987. It said:

“Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

The President’s Council on Sustainable Development takes much the same tack in its definition of “sustainability,” but adds some important detail about what our “needs” in the present and the future really are:

“A sustainable United States will have a growing economy that provides equitable opportunities for satisfying livelihoods and a safe, healthy, high quality of life for current and future generations.”

In its simplest sense, “sustainability” is our ability to keep going. It is almost always mentioned in an environmental context, as it should be. A growing number of countries and global corporations recognize that our continued success depends on truly understanding what sustainability is all about in a world with nearly 7 billion people and growing, even as the natural environment that sustains us is not growing. Food marketers and agricultural producers recognize that more and more of their customers deeply care about these issues.

At its heart, the California dairy industry is built on the fundamental concepts of sustainability. Dairy farm families must care for the earth, so they can continue to grow crops to feed their livestock, and in turn produce milk that is the basis for the state’s nutritious, high-quality dairy products. These products help nourish and sustain the people of California and beyond, while creating hundreds of

thousands of jobs on and off the farm, to create the satisfying livelihoods and growing economy mentioned by the President's Council – the very things that make the difference between surviving and thriving. This is the most important point about sustainability: Environmental and economic sustainability must go hand in hand. Without either one, we can't go on for long.

Dairying exemplifies sustainable farming and livestock practices, and dairy families are the heart of sustainable communities across California. They provide a unique way of life that has been handed down for generations in many families across many cultures, embracing both tradition and innovation, so that heritage can be balanced with the ability to succeed now and in the future.

With the cooperation of the California Milk Advisory Board and California Dairy Research Foundation, CARES will soon publish and distribute a "Report to the Community" that provides further details about the efforts being made within our California dairy industry to achieve sustainability, from protecting our air and water quality to generating new sources of renewable energy. We will also tell the success story of dairy families who are working hard to preserve and enhance the communities in which they live, who understand the importance of honoring both the past generations and the future ones.

While there always is room for improvement, California dairy families deserve this recognition for their long commitment to sustainability. "Sustainability" may be a new word for many, but it's not a new idea. CARES coalition members will continue to tell this story while supporting efforts through research and education to further improve the California's commitment to environmentally and economically sustainable dairy farming.

CARES is a statewide coalition supporting economic and environmental sustainability for California's dairy industry. CARES members include the Alliance of Western Milk Producers, Bank of the West, Bar 20 Dairy Farms, California Dairies Inc., California Dairy Campaign, California Farm Bureau Federation, Dairy Farmers of America-California, Dairy Institute of California, Hilmar Cheese Co., HP Hood, Joseph Gallo Farms, Land O' Lakes, Milk Producers Council, Turlock Dairy & Refrigeration, Western United Dairymen, and others. For information about CARES, visit our web site at www.dairycares.com, write dairycares@aol.com or call 916-441-3318.