



Fall - October 2020

What's Happening at DQC

The Dairy Quality Center (DQC) is very proud of having a network of 100+ independent veterinarians working in the Verified Premium Program (VPP) certification program, with over 145 dairies. We know that because of veterinarian involvement with the program— and the continual improvement on farms – we will be able to better answer the challenges our industry tackles in the face of consumer demand around the subjects of animal wellbeing, pathogen risk mitigation, antibiotic stewardship, and environmental sustainability, to mention a few. As such, we dedicate this issue of DQC Update to the work we are doing with veterinarians, and we recognize their contributions.

RACE® Webinar Series

Over the past two months, through the sponsorship of Caviness Beef Packers, CS Beef Packers, and Diamond V, we conducted a multi-part American Association of Veterinary State Boards (AAVSB) RACE® accredited educational webinar series. Topics included in the series were:

- Heat Stress: The Effects on Gut Health and Strategies to Managing the Inevitable
- Connecting the Dots Between Health and Immunity, and Reaching Her Genetic Potential
- Culling Decisions: Economic and Welfare Considerations

For each topic we were joined by VPP veterinarians. Those attending were eligible to receive one RACE credit per topic. We heard, based on feedback we received through a survey offered immediately following each session, that the series was of value to our members and all respondents would be interested in attending future DQC educational programs. To continue to support our veterinarians, we are looking for opportunities to bring ongoing education to you.

Veterinarian of the Year

We also want to congratulate Elizabeth Kohtz DVM, of Twin Falls, Idaho, who is the recipient of DQC's **2020 Dairy Quality Veterinarian of the Year** award. Dr. Kohtz works with various VPP certified herds. She has been working with the VPP program for the past three years. In 2020 she had the most dairies in the 90%+ grading list on the VPP walk-through audit, making them Sustainable Dairy Award winners. In honor of the award, DQC and [Diamond V](#) will make a \$1,000 donation in Dr. Kohtz's name to [Magic Valley Dairy Heifer Program](#), a local not-for-profit group chosen by Dr. Kohtz.



We can't thank our VPP certified producers and veterinarians enough for your commitment to continuous improvement for the betterment of our US milk and beef supply. We recognize and appreciate your constant dedication through these trying times.



Consumer Insights

Have you been to a supermarket or restaurant recently and NOT seen mention of HOW a particular item was produced? We live in an age where consumer interest in WHAT food contains – or doesn't – and HOW it was produced – or wasn't – has never been higher. Because of this, retailers, brands, and food chains that serve consumers all play an increasingly important role in influencing HOW food is produced. Opinions differ as to whether the consumer should have any role in how farming is done. But the supply chain from your farm to their kitchen table features hundreds of consumer-facing brands, companies, and leaders who are trying to ensure they stay on top of the ever-evolving consumer need.

Today's trends open opportunities for producers to embrace products and practices that fit with where consumers are going as a way to differentiate their product. The Dairy Quality Center (DQC) sits right in the center of this opportunity. By monitoring the adoption of a variety of proven practices, you and DQC help downstream processors and brands achieve better yields, better quality, and more confidence that animal care and farming practices are constantly evolving to meet the need of consumers.

Our partner Diamond V sees the same opportunity. Its natural immune support and productivity platform are timely in an age where consumers are asking brands to take proactive steps towards continuously improving animal care, antibiotic stewardship, and environmental sustainability without compromising taste, quality, or price*. Some of the questions being asked include:

- How do we better understand what motivates food companies handle, process, and market meat and milk you produce
- How can we help them understand your role and our support as part of the solution to today's consumer-led demands?
- Aside from price, taste, and quality, what other factors influence consumer decisions?
- Who do they trust as they look down the supply chain and towards the farm?
- Who do they hold most responsible?
- How do they view the role of animal health in relation to their own health? Where do they sit regarding antibiotic use?

In 2019 Diamond V commissioned Engine Insights, an independent research firm, to begin understanding these questions and other topics where consumer demand intersects with farming. In past DQC Update editions, we've shared highlights of that work. We encourage you to keep these findings in mind as you participate in the DQC program and evaluate the many factors including processors,

food service, retail, and branded customers downstream from you. Progressively assess what the consumer is thinking as they source meat, milk, and eggs. For example:

- **Price is "king", but food safety matters.** Consumers do associate the health of the animal with their own. It's true – fresh vegetables and poultry come most to mind in terms of food safety; but with the COVID pandemic leading more consumers to prepare meals at home, safety will remain a priority.
- Regarding food safety, consumers believe **the farmer is most responsible**, followed by the processing plant. This sets your participation in DQC up well...as do findings that **consumers trust farmers** – and themselves – most across the chain.
- "Social responsibility" themes such as **environment, antibiotic stewardship/reduction, animal welfare**, and even **labor practices are increasing in their relevance** as purchase-criteria factors. Some food companies use these themes as market differentiators. Many don't. But **increasingly, "social responsibility" is a purchase-decision factor.**
- When it comes to health, consumers intuitively understand the role immunity plays in their own health **and** that of the animal. The majority of respondents support antibiotic use on farms to treat or prevent illness. Notably though, over half believe antibiotic resistance is a threat, and over half believe animals raised without antibiotics are "healthier" from a food standpoint. Very few supported antibiotics used for "performance" and ¼ said antibiotics shouldn't be used for ANY reason. In essence, **consumers are saying, "we support antibiotics, but we want animals to be healthy to begin with, and we want antibiotics to be used only when necessary."** This trend has been building for years, and will likely continue to grow.
- Finally, **we learned "language matters"** when it comes to discussing how farm products and practices can benefit price, quality, environment, and more. **If topics are positioned too technically, or from a "farm-centric" angle, consumers can become confused, or worse, unsupportive** – even if the underlying science practice in question is safe, sound, and effective.

This consumer research validates that the work you, your veterinarian, and DQC are doing is valuable. Opening your operations to evaluation, sharing with transparency, and implementing best practices, combined with working with supply chain partners helps drive confidence and support for your business. Thank you for all you do to keep quality dairy and beef products flowing!

*natural as defined by AAFCO

Did You Know: Large Percentage of Consumers Connect Food-Animal Health with Their Own

For many consumers, knowing how animals are raised is an important consideration in their purchasing decision. Similarly, expectations around antibiotic use and stewardship, and animal care continue to grow. This spells opportunity for you. According to a quantitative January 2019 nationwide consumer research survey conducted by Engine Insights across 1,005 respondents:

- **91% of respondents said they believe the health of animals raised for food affects their own health.**
- "What food animals eat on the farm" was a very important, important, or somewhat important consideration to 89% of respondents. Regarding antibiotics, 55% agreed and 35% were neutral on the statement, "I believe antibiotic resistance is a major threat to my health."
- When asked to comment on the statement, "I believe food from animals raised without antibiotics is healthier for me and my family," 51% agreed, 36% were neutral, and 12% disagreed.
- Finally, when asked whether they believed, "antibiotics should be used for...", over 80% of respondents selected, "treat or prevent illness"; 25% also selected, "antibiotics should never be used in food production." This indicates the uncertainty that exists across many consumers on the topic.