



News Release

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"Connecting Cows, Cooperatives, Capitol Hill, and Consumers"

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Representatives from Major Food Marketing Companies Extol Need for Continuous Improvement and Collaboration with Dairy Farmers

ORLANDO, FL – Representatives from Chobani, Walmart, Starbucks and Kroger commended dairy producers this week for their hard work and passion, but also for their dedication to top-notch animal care, during a panel session at the 2015 Annual Meeting.

During a discussion Tuesday, NMPF Vice President of Animal Care Emily Meredith hosted a conversation on the shared expectations between well-known food brands and dairy producers on the subject of animal care. Panelists included Michael Gonda, senior vice president of communications for Chobani; Tres Bailey, director of federal government relations at Walmart; Ann Burkhart, director of ethical sourcing for Starbucks; and Mike Nosewicz, Vice President of Network Optimization and Fresh Dairy at Kroger.

Each panelist said their company is often contacted by "hyper-conscious" consumers who want to understand how their food goes from the farm to the dinner table, and if it's produced humanely. One of the most common issues raised, they said, is tail docking.

"We realize we're not experts in this," said Gonda, of Chobani. "When it comes to something like animal welfare, we need to look at consumer expectations and have an emotional response."

One way to connect on that emotional level is for farmers to utilize social media to share their experiences with animal care and the National Dairy FARM (Farmers Assuring Responsible Management) Program. Today's customers, said Bailey, are embracing communications on the internet, and companies need to meet them there, instead of the other way around. Several other panelists echoed this sentiment.

"We should celebrate the incredible work this industry does," said Gonda. "And share information about that work so consumers understand the care that goes into dairy products."

The FARM Program used Tuesday's panel to help launch several social media accounts that will broadcast farmers' stories and share their support of animal well-being. Meredith fielded some questions from the audience using the Twitter hashtag [#FARMProud](https://twitter.com/FARMProud).

Many concerns around animal care arise from consumers being misinformed, said Burkhart, of Starbucks. No matter the consumer's agenda, a company must correct any falsities and provide a way for that consumer to trust the company.

"We want to tell stories with metrics about dairy farming across the supply chain," she said. "That will create opportunities for us to share your message with customers."

The panelists noted the benefits of the FARM Program, and how it's improved the company's relationship with their suppliers. Almost all of the panelists lauded the recent NMPF Board decision to phase out the practice of tail docking by Jan. 1, 2017. Nosewicz called the decision "a godsend."

Bailey said that in conversations with commodity groups, the FARM Program emerged as the leader in animal care practices.

"The FARM Program is consistently one of the best animal care program we've seen," he said. "Kudos to you."

A consistent theme during the panel was the concept of "continuous improvement" toward a transparent and ethical supply chain. The FARM Program, Nosewicz continued, supports this idea.

"We want the dairy industry to be the gold standard for animal care," he said. "We're not there yet, but we are getting closer."

Added Burkhart: "We want basic animal care and welfare to be collaborative. It shouldn't be a competitive sport."

For more information, visit www.nationaldairyfarm.com.

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The National Milk Producers Federation (NMPF), based in Arlington, VA, develops and carries out policies that advance the well being of dairy producers and the cooperatives they own. The members of NMPF's cooperatives produce the majority of the U.S. milk supply, making NMPF the voice of more than 32,000 dairy producers on Capitol Hill and with government agencies. For more on NMPF's activities, visit our website at www.nmpf.org.