

INTERNATIONAL DAIRY magazine



Dairy must fight and act!

EDA annual convention 2020 - online



Opening the annual convention of EDA (European Dairy association), EDA president Michel Nalet (Lactalis), pointed out to the situation of the industry that is overshadowed by Brexit taking place in a mere 40 days and a lack of dynamics in EU markets. The online event counted 250 registered participants representing the dairy industry, the public sector, politics and associations not only from Europe but also from North and South America and a number of other countries.

The convention focused on sustainability and how the dairy industry can help reach climate protection goals while keeping itself and rural livelihood intact and carrying on supplying high-quality products to consumers. Under the motto „EU Milk & Dairy: Essential for Your Life!“, Nalet highlighted that the European dairy sector is fully in line with the ambitions of the EU Green Deal that is intended to lead to a climate neutral Continent by 2050. The Green Deal as far as it regards dairy is ,

however, not managed by DG AGRI of the EU Commission but by the environment and health directorates. More than 120 legislative initiatives have been announced by the Commissions for the next years to bring forward the Green Deal in the the food system. This adds to the anyway complex situation the lactosphere has to face.

Green Deal: Lactosphere will be involved



Claire Bury, Deputy Director General - DG SANTE, confirmed that the EU Commission will involve the the dairy sector when developing Green Deal legislation. There will be impact assessments of legislation as well, she added, pointing out to the fact that Corona has underlined the importance of a sustainable food system. The Green Deal will bring challenges, Bury admitted, but these will create also new business and job opportunities. The European farm sector will not be left alone, Europe will invest in resarch and innovation initiatives as well as it will develop advisory services and support digitisation in rural areas. Dairy is an essential for EU agriculture, Bury stated, acknowledging the progress the dairy sector has already made in terms of

sustainability. Once Corona is over, it is not time to go back to business as usual, rather the industry needs to go forward, the Commission official said.

Fight the urban utopia!



The upcoming UN Food Systems Summit will be of key importance to the dairy industry. The UN have set out to fight hunger, help solve water and urban issues etc. in major move. Prof. Peer Ederer, Global Food and Agribusiness Network, thinks that this initiative will be the dominating topic for the next 10 years as the global food systems are not arranged in a way to help reach the climate and sustainability goals. Dairy, Ederer said, is a pillar of agriculture and especially the European industry is a bedrock of the global dairy world.

But dairy is under heavy attack, blamed for its climate effects and poor animal welfare while on the other hand plant-based alternatives are praised as saviours. A 100% vegan life is however a West European urban utopia. There are loud voices form NGOs and politics that 2030 will mark the year when it all will be vegan and the cow will be discarded. Media, politics and NGOs are in their own echo-chamber, Edererer said, and have become immune to scientific evidence.

How easy such „evidence“ can be generated was illustrated by Ederer when he referred to the WHO`s warning of red meat causing cancer. There is no multitude of studies underpinning this alarm, it all bases on a single claim by a British scientist dating back to 2011 whose work was funded by an NGO whose way of making a living, in turn, is constant warning of cancer. „The optinion of scientists is not scientific evidence“, Ederer said.

Science in fact says that dairy is no climate killer, in contrary it helps fight climate change. The dairy industry, Ederer demanded, must decide whether it wants to stay a supplier of natural goodness or evolve into a factory urban utopia style. The lactosphere should aggressively fight disinformation by NGOs, media and politics, Ederer advised, warning of the enormous amount of momentum in Social Media against animal production. Dairy needs not do this alone, there are natural allies in nearby sectors.

How can dairy help achieve a sustainable diet?



George Morrison, Director Global Public Affairs Arla Foods, pointed out the improvement the dairy sector has achieved in terms of sustainability over the past 30 years in Europe. Dairy cattle population has decreased by 40% while milk yield per cow per day has increased by 73%. Carbon intensity (kg CO₂eq./kg milk) has decreased by 41%, accordingly. Dairy is a mainstay in rural Europe, central to the EU food culture and creates more than a million jobs. The debate about dairy is too one-dimensional given this background, Morrison said. The question, therefore, should be how can dairy help achieve a sustainable diet. The lactosphere cannot solve all this alone. It needs political backing, the global importance of dairy to society, economy and nutrition needs to get into the focus, according to Morrison.

A new survey conducted for Arla found that 18% of Nordic consumers think that dairy is bad for the environment. 24% of consumers in the UK and 26% in Germany share the same opinion. The problem is even worse when youngsters are considered. Only 50% of the age group is aware of official dietary guidelines. Main food habit influencers are parents, friends and Social Media. Channels mainly used for healthy eating guidance are Social Media, online recipes and YouTube. There is narrow understanding of sustainable diets, these are linked to environmental parameters and not health and nutrition.

Morrison said that the role dairy farming plays in capturing carbon must be communicated as well as farmers and businesses should be empowered to make the necessary changes. There needs to be a level playing field across the food sector on issues like animal welfare. Positive change should be encouraged while maintaining the economic and social sustainability of the dairy sector and the lactosphere needs to invest in reducing emissions. Science based consumer communication will help them make informed choices, Morrison added.

Foods need to be seen holistic



Dr. Judith Bryans, CEO Dairy UK, underlined that the health and nutritional value of dairy makes a difference. Consumers have always loved dairy and even those who were turning away from dairy developed a new found love for dairy products during Covid 19 lockdowns. Many people would find it very difficult to meet their nutritional needs without milk and dairy products, Bryans said, and it is not possible to feed the world without dairy protein. In fact, dairy is an important part of the elements that can bring forward the Sustainable Development Goals of the UN.

But the positive story of dairy has simply been forgotten as health care systems globally are under threat from the burden of dealing with non communicable diseases and a large number of people doesn't have enough food, or enough food of good enough nutritional quality, which impacts on their health and their potential to live productive lives. The world is also struggling with the number of people who overconsume food with overweight and obesity costing billions and while the world is behind on delivering against the SDGs the major focus is on environment.

Bryans criticised the new overly simplistic rules of nutrient labelling. When just looking at sugar, fat and salt contents, an artificial beverage such as Coke ranks better than a food like dairy that brings along good nutrition (vitamins, protein, minerals...). Foods need to be seen holistic and not just from the percentage of ingredients they have.

Nutri-score and the like don't take into account nutritional benefits and do not at all help consumers to make good nutritional decisions. In that respect, Bryans said that the industry-internal term full-fat does not go well with consumers – the dairy industry should reconsider how it talks about its products. Bryans' criticism was shared by DG SANTE official Bury who agreed that nutrition labelling needs to be improved. Bury also pointed out to origin

labelling that leads to fragmentation in the Single Market, and demanded level playing field for all in the supply chain.

The 2021 EDA annual convention will take place in Madrid next year – physically, with Guiseppe Ambrosi as chairman who follows Michel Nalet as EDA president.