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After raining for weeks on end, there was finally a break in the weather- the time had come. We hooked up our old horse trailer and headed to the heifer ranch to select my first dairy replacement heifer. As a scrawny freshman in FFA, my parents had been encouraging, yet hesitant. Boggling through the muddy pens, we trod from heifer to heifer, looking for the right characteristics and confirmation. After a bit of wrangling, we finally had the right one. Over the coming weeks and months, I would learn that although we had sorted and picked based on physical traits, it seemed that the resulting selection was the world's most individually minded heifer. I battled my new commitment. But no matter how many times I got stepped on, dragged around, or no reaction whatsoever when attempting to walk her, I dusted myself off and tried again.

The same story of resilience can be shared about the California dairy industry. Adapting to an endless stream of new challenges and shifting demands, the California dairy industry continues to drive forward.

One trend we must adapt to is our customer's desire for sustainability. A demand for sustainability is the ultimate compliment from our customers. After fulfilling our customer's requests for affordability, consistency, and high quality, our customers now want to ensure they can purchase our products for years to come. But this request requires intense investment and innovation to elevate the importance of sustainability to the same level as affordability, consistency, and quality.

Sustainability is a systemic approach for the entire dairy production system. From crop production to dairy farm to processor then grocer, sustainability encompasses environmental, social, and economic considerations. Unlike food trends or regional weather patterns, incorporating and reporting our sustainability efforts require a culture and values shift, which fundamentally changes how we dairy.

Environmental sustainability is the most visible of these concerns. Being frequently painted as environmental catastrophes, our dairy businesses must do more to show our contribution to the water, nutrient, and life cycles. According to US Dairy, based on the 2008 Farm Census, feed for dairy animals utilized 8.4% of all cropland in the United States. In California, we must comply with standards and regulations set forth by the California Air Resources Board, California Water Resources Control Board, and our local Groundwater Sustainability Agencies. Environmental sustainability of our industry must prove that we can provide the same high-quality products with minimal or no negative impacts on our natural resources. Our efforts today must reflect that we are already on that path.

Social sustainability includes responsibility toward our employees, our community, and the concerns of our consumers. We must focus on providing gainful employment and safe environments for our staff and recognize our part in the local community. Society provides us with a social license to operate, but that relationship requires constant cultivation. As an industry, we must either share the reasoning behind our best practices or listen to our consumers concerns

to develop new ones.

Economic sustainability is the most important to our dairy farmers. Beyond just the livelihood of our families, dairies also employ thousands of employees of other families. Economic sustainability means being able to survive through the tough times, but also experiencing success in the good times. Success in the good times is not just business continuity, but profitability which enables us to pay off debt, invest in capital projects, and expand. Environmental and social sustainability can only be achieved if a business is economically sustainable.

On a global scale, the importance of the dairy industry becomes even more critical. The dairy industry serves as a foundational member of the supply chain for thousands of dairy-based products around the globe. According to the International Farm Comparison Network, the world has over 250 million dairy cattle, but the average herd size is approximately 3 cows. The American dairy production system, with California as its crown jewel, is the world's role model. For the rest of the globe, technology, herd care techniques, feed systems, and management styles, to name a few, are based on the U.S. dairy industry. If the California dairy industry cannot meet the sustainability demands placed upon it, chances are no one else can either.

Reflecting on the California dairy industry, one word comes to mind: sustenance. By definition, sustenance is food and drink regarded as a source of strength; nourishment.

The dairy industry in California provides sustenance to millions of hungry mouths on a daily basis. And we provide sustenance to the natural resources we steward. We provide sustenance to the local communities we provide jobs and support for. We provide sustenance to our local, regional, state, and federal governments through diligently complying with regulations and contributions in taxes. And, most importantly, we provide sustenance to the hundreds of hard-working dairying families in California.

But how we accomplish that goal is ever changing. As a college student, I am an optimist. Looking upon our challenges and problems, I see opportunities for new innovations and improvements. Working for an ag-tech firm and studying mechanical engineering at Fresno State, I hope that my talents and passion will be a small part of those solutions. The California dairy industry is resilient because we have shown that through creativity and determination, we can overcome any challenge.

How we will meet the challenges of the future - to become more environmentally, socially, and economically sustainable - will write the future of the California dairy industry.