



Hayley Fernandes

Growing up in the nation's dairy capital on a third-generation family dairy farm, I have naturally called this industry home. I grew up like many others, involved in the 4-H and FFA programs where I showed and judged dairy cattle and dairy products. However, I truly found my passion for the dairy industry by getting involved with the California Junior Holstein Association and competing nationally in dairy knowledge quiz bowl competitions, where I met other youth passionate about the dairy industry. This experience allowed me to learn the ins and outs of dairy and understand current events facing the industry. At only fourteen years old, I felt more equipped to talk with dairymen than most kids my age and ask how they felt about topics such as the latest government program affecting dairy, fresh cow disorders, or perhaps which sires they were using most in their herd. The Junior Holstein Association also held prepared public speaking competitions, which allowed me to strengthen my public speaking skills and hear the thoughts of other young enthusiasts. I recall in 2014 listening to a young man a few years older than myself give a speech on sustainability in the California dairy industry and feeling a little perplexed—I did not think the term was of much relevance or importance to the dairy industry. Looking back now, I realize how doubtful and naïve I truly was.

Since hearing that speech at the state Holstein convention, I have seen the changes we have implemented on our own family dairy to become more sustainable and ease government pressures. In 2014 we installed enough solar panels to power our entire dairy and some of the agriculture wells on our property. Most recently, in partnership with Maas Energy Works, a new methane digester was installed on our dairy, converting methane gas into usable transportation fuel by Calgren renewable fuels. Sustainability has also been a household term for the last couple of years as my dad who handles the farming for our dairy, has implemented sustainable measures by switching from conventional tilling to the California "no-till" practice whereby limiting the amount of pressures put on the ground, and implementing a cover crop to strengthen the soil, increase yields, decrease water needs and cut costs through reducing the need for synthetic fertilizers. These changes were significant, but they are not Earth-shattering; they are all practical measures that dairymen across the state can look into and work to make sustainability more than just a trend.

With dairy farmers across the state evaluating their bottom lines and looking to the future of their farms, the word sustainability holds a lot more weight than it did five to ten years ago. It is no surprise that it is becoming harder and harder to stay afloat in the California Dairy industry. Many have realized that certain changes must be made to survive to the next generation. I have always understood sustainability as being responsible with the resources currently available to avoid depletion and secure their availability for future generations. However, for California dairies, that definition is no longer broad enough. From my perspective, dairies that want to last for several more generations need to balance what is economically viable with environmental stewardship as well as seeking to be sustainable in the public's eye. In order to be financially viable in California, many dairies are becoming larger with more efficient cows that eat less and produce more milk. Still, the public insists on more transparency, wanting to know more about the source of their dairy products. Dairy farmers must devote more time to enhancing their communication skills with the general public and become more comfortable with reaching consumers

through social media. It is a lot harder to explain to an average person why cow farts alone are not causing global warming than it is to explain to the neighbor dairyman down the road, that implementing a methane digester is actually benefitting your bottom line in the long run. It is easy to forget the fact that we as agriculturalists make up less than 2% of the population, but it is becoming ever so important for us to spread our message with the general public and listen to their concerns. After all, the dairy industry is nothing without the consumers who purchase the product of our toil, so we had better listen to their questions and concerns.

As a nineteen-year-old girl majoring in dairy science, I hold a lot of faith that there will be a future to this industry that I call home. After graduating, I plan to attend law school in order to work as an agriculture lobbyist in the future, to serve dairy farmers. I realize that many bills are signed into law that negatively affects the dairy and agriculture industry, and I hope to work against that, by promoting legislature that has agriculture in its best interest. I want other politicians and consumers alike to share in my passion by knowing that milk is one of the cheapest, most nutritious beverages available, packing nine essential nutrients and eight grams of protein per serving.

Sustainability is more than just a buzz word. It is changing how the dairy business functions and how others view the industry. For a future in California, the dairy industry must thrive sustainably. We can accomplish this in a variety of ways, but we cannot exclude the public from this conversation. This is of course, no simple task that will be completed overnight, but I am excited to see how dairy farmers continue to innovate and feed the world all the while. We must protect one of California's most productive industries and see its continuation for several generations to come, but to do so, changes along the path towards sustainability must be made.