

# INTERNATIONAL DAIRY magazine



Over 100 representatives of the European dairy industry and associations attended this year's EDA Dairy Policy Conference (photo: IDM)

## **Sustainability: Food – Diet - Dairy**

### **EDA Dairy Policy Conference 2016**

This year's EDA Dairy Policy Conference looked at „sustainability“ from different angles. And, not surprising, the various presenters had quite different things to say on 20 April in Brussels. IDM has intensively listened to the conference speakers and here is our summary.

Sustainability has become a big issue for the dairy sector over the past years and is very likely to become an ever more important basis for success in the market. Fact is that EU policy makers have started to shape the guidelines of a new CAP for the next decade. Most possibly, the greening that has shaped the CAP in recent years will become even more crucial for future milk production.



Karl-Friedrich Falkenberg, European Policy Strategy Centre, Brussels, pointed out that the trends in agricultural production are not moving in the right direction. Sustainability for farmers is under severe stress and the general principle of producing cheaper and more efficient based on high-tech is no more sufficient to support sustainability when it comes to biodiversity or nutrients concentration in ground water, rivers and the sea. „That is a real call to think of how we can improve“, Falkenberg said, adding that producing less might lead to a better and more solid income for farmers.

## The economic dimension



Surely, the most important facet of „sustainability“ for dairy farmers and processors is its economic dimension. Richard Ashworth, a former dairy farmer and now MEP from the UK, said that he puts profitability first when talking about sustainability. There was no conflict between running a productive and competitive dairy farm and sustainability, he said. The industry should be aware that politics' job is not to support farming but to guarantee viability for the EU's 500 million „mouths“, incl. 5 million farmers. It is extremely limited, Ashworth admitted, what the CAP can do for the welfare of the dairy sector. Therefore, industry and farmers need to pull at the few levers they have available for adjusting the market balance in their favour instead of always finding someone else to blame for bad market situations. „The law of supply and demand does not work in the dairy industry. The tougher times get, the more milk they produce“, said Ashworth.



Ashworth was seconded by Roberto Brazzale, a dairy entrepreneur active in Italy, China and the Czech Republic (Brazzale group sales are €145m based on a milk intake of 195m liters of which only 20% are from Italy). Brazzale is an enthusiast supporter of entrepreneurial freedom. Standards like PDO or „organic“ are seen by him as (sometimes ideological) manacles for innovation and consumer orientation while „sustainability“ is just another buzz word. Brazzale aims at providing consumers better and cheaper products while giving them more, better understandable and more relevant information (than contained in legally required product declaration) for which he favours modern web-based features such as QR codes with which one may even track the course of the milk that ends up in products right down to the farm. Of course, Brazzale is also pursuing sustainability, however, in a different approach. For him, water footprint, short milk collection distance and animal welfare on farms are at the core. To make even the environmental emissions of cows, Brazzale is planting trees all around

the farms. Eco-sustainability means efficient use of resources, optimum allocation of processes and overall increase of efficiency, Brazzale said.

### Feeding the world



When it comes to feeding a growing world population, dairy has an important role to play. Not only that it contains a good portion of nutrients and micronutrients, milk is also an affordable and well-tasting source of nutrition, stated Dr. Judith Bryant from Dairy UK. If one wanted to replace milk by vegetable sources of micronutrients one would need an enormous mass of plant material with huge environmental consequences (f.i. one kilogram of spinach brings the same amount of calcium as one glass of milk).



That milk is in fact important for feeding the world's population was acknowledged by Dr. John Ingram, Environmental Change Institute, University of Oxford. He pointed out that one billion people suffer from hunger while two billion people are malnourished and 2.5 billion suffer from overweight. From that perspective, a change in diet seems necessary. „We cannot go on with it as we do. But we need to have control over the change“, Ingram said.



General discussion (from left): : Moderator Jørgen Hald Christensen, Danish Dairy Board, Karl-Friedrich Falkenberg, Dr. Dr. Josta de Hoog and Dr. John Ingram (photo: IDM)

During the various discussions after the presentations, it became obvious that small improvements of mainstream dairy production and products may improve sustainability much more than launching extra-sustainable products that, given their higher price, undoubtedly will stay in niches. Retailers have become more responsible for food sustainability in recent years. But in the end it is always the consumer who decides what product he will buy. If progress is to be made in the context of sustainability and food, governments need to anchor ecological sustainability and health in core policies. Which means that policy must realise that the traditional idea of supporting farmers is no

more sufficient, putting the focus on guaranteeing resilience to the food net, as was pointed out by Dr. Josta de Hoog, Scientific Council for Government Policy, The Hague.



EDA president **Michel Nalet** told the Policy Conference that the dairy industry feels that the EU is trying to use all the tools in its box to help overcome the market crisis but that these tools won't put an end to the adverse situation. At the moment, the future isn't looking bright at all, Nalet said, despite all the long-term positive perspectives of the milk market. But he hopes that he will be able to point to a light at the end of the tunnel during the EDA agm in December in Nice.



Jan Maarten Vrij, NZO, invited the attendants of the EDA Dairy Policy Conference for coming to the **IDF World Dairy Summit** held from 16 to 19 October in Rotterdam. The event under the motto 'Dare to Dairy' has a brand new approach: the program is condensed to 3 days, speakers from outside the dairy sector will be invited to provide the greater picture in a cross-over concept and there will be an online dialogue. Participants may register already at the [conf website](#) now to secure a reduced rate.