Dairy extension programs in the southern region: Finding novel ways to meet the needs of our producers. J. K. Bernard*, University of Georgia, Tifton, GA.

The dairy industry in the southern United States continues to change resulting in fewer, but larger, more intensively managed herds. Today most producers employ consultants (e.g., agronomic, nutrition, reproduction and health, farm business, facilities design) to help management and improve production and return on investment. Also, agribusinesses that serve the dairy industry provide technical support to large producers as they compete with other companies to maintain market share. Most universities have undergone budget cuts necessitating changing how dairy extension programs within each state are operated. Today most university dairy extension specialists have split appointments with research and/or teaching responsibilities, which limits their time for traditional farm visits or county meetings. Specialist must continually work to identify county agent and producer needs that are not being met and develop relative programs and resources. While traditional activities such as conferences, field days, and youth activities are still viable in many areas, specialist must continue to look for new ways to communicate information to producers who are becoming more technologically savvy. In addition to publishing information in newsletters, popular press publications are constantly looking for timely information. The use of blogs and up-to-date websites to provide information has increased, but these must be easy to access and utilize so producers are comfortable using them. Decision tools for evaluating different technologies, management practices, etc. are needed as producers work to maintain profitability during periods of low milk prices. Basic training materials and videos for producers to use training new or existing employees are a viable tool. While not a part of most traditional dairy extension programs, it is essential to partner with industry and dairy organization to provide basic information for consumers who have questions about milk production. These activities should be coordinated among the various universities to take advantage of specialist expertise and avoid duplication of effort. As the industry continues to change, dairy extension programming must evolve to meet the needs within the industry as well as those of the consumer.

Key Words: extension, southern region

Dairy teaching programs in the southern region: Keeping dairy science students relevant for tomorrow’s industry. C. C. Williams*, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA.

The number of dairy science degree programs in the United States has decreased in recent years. Of the 9 universities with dairy science degree programs, only 2 are from the southern United States. While many animal science programs offer courses in dairy science, these courses are not always enough to provide the level of education and experience needed to prepare students for careers in the dairy industry. The dairy teaching programs of today must continue to evolve with the changing demographics of the student population. More students are entering college with little to no dairy experience, yet these talented individuals are passionate about agriculture and possible careers in the dairy industry. Students should be encouraged to seek opportunities beyond the traditional classroom experience. Participation in undergraduate research, internships, national student exchanges, and international programs will allow students to expand their knowledge base and experience beyond the limitations of the traditional university degree. The North American Intercollegiate Dairy Challenge and American Dairy Science Association annual meetings will also provide educational experiences as well as opportunities for networking with potential employers and graduate schools. As dairy science education continues to evolve, non-traditional educational opportunities will better prepare students for careers in the dairy industry and become the industry leaders of the future.

Key Words: education

Dairy research programs in the southern region: Importance of multi-institution and industry collaboration in moving the dairy industry forward. M. A. Ballou*, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX.

Dairy science research will be required to address complex issues of producing more milk and milk products with fewer resources while maintaining the stewardship of the natural resources. Unfortunately, research funding for agriculture are far less when compared with other federal research programs and are not keeping pace with investments made by emerging countries. The expectation is that the agricultural private sector will make up the difference in research funding; however, advancements made by the industry depend significantly on government investments in research. Further, the grand challenges facing the dairy industry will require a trans-disciplinary approach, which will require many partners and bringing scientists together from diverse backgrounds. The USDA has a unique but effective system of funding agricultural research, and the funding streams broadly classify into: (1) USDA Agricultural Research Service, (2) capacity-building funds through land-grant institutions, (3) and competitive grants programs administered by the National Institute of Food and Agriculture. A recent report evaluated the effectiveness of capacity-building funding through USDA and one of the main advantages identified was the financial leveraging of government funds, and that much of the leveraging was at the local level. A program that was authorized in the 2014 Farm Bill, the Foundation for Food and Agriculture Research, relies on leveraging financial support from non-federal sources, and maybe a model for future funding. Although, the US dairy industry competes in a global market many of the challenges faced by dairy producers are regional. Some repetition across dairy research programs is needed, but with contracted funding and improved technology in telecommunications, programs need to invest their resources more strategically. Institutions could prioritize financial support to develop core research areas and rely more on collaborations. Investing in both foundational and innovative dairy science research is essential to keep the American dairy industry competitive in this global economy.

Key Words: collaboration, funding, research