

## **The dairy industry needs to change to stay relevant to consumers**

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I'm writing this article in January, it's -6, I have pneumonia and my furnace is broken. I'm not in the best of moods. As a warning, this article might make you angry, it will likely put you on the defensive, but please read the full article, digest it, ruminate on it and then feel free to call or email me with your irate comments. Dairy farmers – we need to listen to what our consumers want and change to meet their need. If we don't, we will continue on a downward spin.

Yesterday, Chobani announced they are releasing non-dairy single-serve yogurts (which they're calling "non-dairy Chobani"), they'll also release a new non-dairy single-serve drink. Chobani is not using the word yogurt, and it does not appear on the label (at least not the one that has been released as of 1/10/2018), the media is using the phrase "non-dairy yogurt". Throughout the day I saw numerous posts from dairy farmers furious about this. "How could Chobani do this to them?" "Another imitation product." Some of the posts used expletives but none of my farming friends seemed too happy about this product.

While scrolling through facebook, through the many irate farmer posts, I came across one that was excited about the product. A good friend from high school had a post "this is great, I can finally eat something that compares to yogurt". My friend is breast feeding and her daughter has severe food allergies which include soy, gluten and dairy. My friend hasn't been able to eat dairy (along with many other delicious foods) for nearly a year, she is a rockstar for the life changes she has made for her baby. She has been looking for and trying "non-dairy" products and commenting most of them are not the most appealing. While I don't support the use of milk and dairy or the phrase "non-dairy" on imitation products, there is percentage of the population that CAN NOT consume dairy. For some it might be a few dairy products, maybe just fluid milk, but for some people with severe food allergies they can't consume any dairy products. This is not their fault. For some people, they don't like dairy. I'm guessing everyone reading this article has a food they don't like. For me it's sushi. Am I being attacked for not liking sushi? NO, so let's not attack people who don't like a food or can not eat a food. It's called not being a jerk.

Dairy farmers – it's time to wake up, Chobani is a business. They are not here to 100% support dairy farmers. They are a business that needs to make money to pay their employees and yes, the CEO and owners. They are a business; they want to make a profit. I'm hoping all of you (dairy farmers) want to make a profit. That is the goal of any business. Chobani is making a business decision. The consumers want this product, they are willing to pay extra for it, so Chobani is making it. Why should they make this product? Because there are people who cannot eat dairy, there are people who want a non-dairy option. Is this competition for us, YES.

Maybe we (dairy farmers, agribusiness affiliate, people who love agriculture and dairy products) need to listen to the consumer concerns, interests and what they want for products. Instead of constantly being on the defensive and complaining about how the consumers don't know anything and how they want to dictate what we do, may be should listen. Let's listen, what do the consumers actually want? Let's take action, change our product and image and move with the times. So consumers want a more convenient bottle that fits in a car cup holder, they want different flavors, they want something that is shelf stable, something that is high protein and low sugar...Let's get creative! Maybe, just maybe is we are willing to

listen, and make changes, WE, we, the dairy farmers can be the competition and provide multiple products that meet the continually changing consumer demands. If we want to stay relevant, we need to continue to change.

When you go to the grocery store you buy what you want, what is convenient and what fits in your budget. Let's make dairy fit those categories.

Now, as I started – you are likely not happy with 100% of what I wrote. Some of it likely made you angry, but I'm guessing all of you want to be profitable. You want to see the dairy industry succeed. I want to see the dairy industry continue to be a forefront for human nutrition. Call you cooperatives, call DMI, call your local check off. Let's get creative and move into the future. If you still want to call or email me with comments – please feel free, [kmm434@cornell.edu](mailto:kmm434@cornell.edu), (603)-568-1404. But do you really want to waste that time complaining, or do you want to make a phone call that could be productive?