

Global Dairy Farmers congress inspires participants by challenging their thoughts and strategies

Europe – June 27 2018 | The Global Dairy Farmers Congress 2018 Western Europe started with a kick-off in Berlin, Germany. With more than 60 participants from countries such as Kuwait, Canada, New Zealand, Uruguay and Germany, different nationalities and cultures are well represented. The participating dairy farmers all have different strategies and visions. It is a week of good discussions: with each other, but also with the participating decisionmakers of i.e. WWF, Barry-Callebaut, Danone, Friesland Campina and Lely. Topics were high tech & smart dairy farming, sustainability and short chain & direct selling. The mixture of dairy farmers and other food&agri experts resulted in food for thought, and thoughts for food (production).

Global Dairy Farmers (GDF) gives progressive dairy farmers and other dairy experts a platform to enhance and exchange their knowledge, gather ideas for new business ventures and see how the world can keep on producing great dairy in the far future. The members come from all corners of the world. The knowledge and entrepreneurship of the leading dairy farmers and decisionmakers in the dairy industry are overwhelming and is gathered through the GDF network. To get everyone together GDF organizes an annual congress. Last year GDF went to Indonesia, this year the congress took place in Western-Europe. In this event GDF looked at global and subsequently local trends in Germany, found out about the impact of big data and smart dairy farming and what is new in this scene in the Netherlands and ended up by visiting best practice dairy farmers in added value and direct selling in Italy.

After the official opening of the congress by GDF President Ad van Velde in Berlin, Germany, the discussion topics were all about global and European trends: what are the opportunities and challenges? Prof. Dr. Folkhard Isermeyer, President of the Thünen Institute, talked about the influence of different policies (including climate) on dairy production: ““We have to work on an National Livestock strategy to develop a sector that is accepted by the society within 15 years. In fact it should be a European strategy, but this would be too soft and too slow. We cannot wait for Europe.” Dr. Birgit Wilhelm of WWF challenged the GDF group on how to tackle the environmental and sustainability issues of feed for dairy production. Cees-Jan Hollander told GDF about achieving Danone’s ambitious sustainability targets: “We want to do this in partnership with our supplying farmers. We don’t want to be a policeman.” The seminar ended with inside information on what German retailers demands are for dairy products by Christa Langen, communication representative for several (dairy) companies that supply to German retailers: “50% of the German milk supply is now non GM, this only came up in the last three years or so.”

Global Dairy Farmers picked the best-practise dairy farmers in Germany, which the group visited on Monday and Tuesday. Three dairy farmers with different main strategies: low cost, consumer oriented and energy making, but all with animal welfare as a high priority.

Following the farm visits, on Wednesday GDF organized the Dairy Tech Seminar at VIV Europe in Utrecht. High-level speakers such as Alexander van der Lely (CEO Lely International) and Frans Keurentjes (President Friesland Campina) talked about big data and developments in the dairy sector. Yasir Khokar of Connecterra told us “We don't need data. We need insights. Artificial Intelligence will help us in this.” Sjaak Wolfert of Wageningen University mentioned “It is not the technology that is an issue, it is the trust of people”. Mary Ledman of Rabobank shared her insight on dairy and non-dairy developments worldwide. Interesting was

her mentioning of the rapid consolidation of dairy production in the US on large scale farms with low costs, this seems an opposite development from the one in Europe with a much stronger focus on sustainability.

The second part of the program focussed on added value and on-farm-dairy-processing. Starting off with a visit to Den Eelder. A dairy farm and processing company from the van der Schans family who have succeeded in developing their own brand supplying several retailers. And finally GDF travelled to Bologna in Italy. This is a region with several examples of farmers creating added value and this way achieving possibly the highest milk price in Europe up to 70€ per 100 kg.

An intense program with inspiring speakers, aspirational dairy farmers and food for thought.

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