

SUMMER SUSTAINABILITY SERIES

Webinar 3: Feeding Future Sustainable Protein Systems

[Full Recording](#)
Highlights Video

WEBINAR TAKEAWAYS

Lessons for Feed from Animal Agriculture's Sustainability Journey

Our peers in animal agriculture, that is the farmers and ranchers who produce meat, milk and eggs every day for Americans to eat, must think holistically about the sustainability of their production systems. Beyond their downstream customers' sustainability reporting desires, they are responsible to the communities surrounding their farms, regulatory agencies monitoring environmental impact and consuming public's perceptions.

In support of the upcoming [Feed Systems Sustainability Summit](#), the Institute for Feed Education and Research (IFEEDER) and World Wildlife Fund (WWF) hosted a [webinar](#) to hear from our animal agriculture peers on the ways the feed industry can support them in their sustainability efforts. Speakers included Suzanne Vold, co-owner, Dorrich Dairy; Sam Krouse, vice president of business development, MPS Egg Farms; Dr. Samantha Werth, executive director, U.S. Roundtable for Sustainable Beef (USRSB); and Ashley McDonald, interim vice president of sustainability, National Pork Board (NPB).

Instead of focusing the takeaways on how the feed industry can support their sustainability efforts, let's focus on what they're doing that we should learn from.

1) Sustainability Supports Legacy and Community

As a fourth-generation dairy operation, Dorrich Dairy is working to extend their legacy. They live and make decisions by five value statements: do common things uncommonly well, leave it better than when they came, promote agriculture, surround themselves with great people and do the right thing. To ensure their legacy, the impact of their decisions is considered not just 10 years down the road, but 20 to 40 years. Then, they open their doors to the community and share their story.

Sustainability is a long game and a journey of continuous improvement, Vold explained, and decisions aren't made just to satisfy a purchaser's environmental impact request, but they are also considered for their benefits to the farm's ability to continue operating, animals and people at the operation. For example, Vold said that Dorrich Dairy uses robotics milkers and barn cleaning to benefit labor needs and animal welfare, variable speed drives on all motors and LED lighting to improve energy efficiency, biologic predator fly control and composted manure bedding to increase cow comfort and buffer strips and cover crops to prevent nutrient loss and improve crop production.

2) Sustainability Creates Product Differentiation

Starting as a grain mill in 1875, the operations of what is now [MPS Egg Farms](#) have evolved for more than a century. Beginning egg production in the late 1960s, today the company is vertically integrated

and raises 11 million hens on farms across three states and are raising about 25% of those hens cage-free. Krouse said if you look to the consumer, they recognize that we are all, at some level, in their chain of influence. Therefore, they are seeking ways to bring the great programs and practices that are happening on farms and in the feed mills to the influencers all the way down to the retailers and consumers.

Today, they are piloting the first-in-market program in eggs to source verified low carbon grain at a level suitable for a retailer to claim Scope 3 emissions reductions or to support low carbon claims. They are doing that by partnering with their farmers to purchase grains in which the farmer has provided data on the in-field production practices through the Farmer Business Network's Gradable platform. Gradable then scores the grain with a carbon score which MPS can apply to production in the feed mill and carry through to fed hens and produced eggs all the way to awareness by the customer. They've currently scored about 10% of their corn inputs and look to being able to tell that story of their framework to build the overall sustainability picture for MPS Farms.

3) Sustainability Needs Collaboration

The USRSB came into being in 2015 with membership across the beef value chain now with over 140 members that span beyond the value chain into civil society and allied industries. In April 2022, they launched [their industrywide sustainability goals, which](#) include targets specific to each sector of their value chain. Collaboration across the full beef value chain, from the cow-calf operator to the retail-food service and the allied industry organizations in between (e.g., feed), is inherent to achieving the goals and milestones they have established.

Additionally, they recognize feed is bigger than beef alone. The opportunity for feed lies in collectively working across all livestock sectors to collaborate, Werth said. Many of the needs the beef industry has identified for feed are important to other sectors, for example, feed to enhance animal production and performance, feed to reduce human food waste and increased feed data availability to represent sustainable systems. Importantly, collaboration isn't one-way. USRSB wants to know how beef helps the feed industry demonstrate feed sector sustainability efforts already happening and what else they do to support feed.

4) Sustainability Also Means Conveying Continuous Improvement

The actions required to advance sustainability are paramount to achieving the desired outcomes and goals being set. But, laying out a way to measure those actions that leads to conveying what those actions represent is also important. For animal agriculture, it's necessary to convey the continuous improvement story to stakeholders in the supply chain, as well as to external stakeholders and ultimately to consumers to build trust and value in U.S. pork products here and around the world, McDonald explained.

The National Pork Board has program for their pork producers to use that captures environmental outcomes for the practices being implemented in their systems from feedstuff production to operations on the farm. It not only identifies value-add or cost savings on the farm, but also represents outcomes in a way that means something to a stakeholder less familiar with on-farm operations.

As suppliers and customers within the livestock and poultry value chain, feed's role is clearly understood. There is an opportunity to learn a lot from our animal peers who have been working hard to carve a path for sustainability to grow within the industry. Each of these four lessons are useful to consider when advancing solutions around feed sustainability.