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Quality dairying

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Editorial

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The Journal of Dairy Research is once again collaborating with the Hannah Dairy Research Foundation (the Hannah) to deliver the *Next Generation Dairying Conference 2023*. This will be the fifth in the recent series of Workshops and Conferences sponsored by the Hannah (the Hannah Research Institute organised many others in the past). The theme this year is *Next Generation* ***Quality*** *Dairying* and, as with all of the previous meetings, the intention is to address the topic ('quality') from the perspective of the complete dairy foods chain. The Conference will be held close to Edinburgh at the Moredun Research Institute, where we have been before and have always been made extremely welcome. The format will also be the same as before, a 'lunch to lunch' meeting with afternoon and then morning sessions on the 20th and 21st November. Put the date in your diary! Rest assured that the science will be of the highest quality, featuring international keynote speakers as well as shorter presentations from up and coming early stage researchers. These meetings have established themselves as rather unique on the dairy research stage, focused on cutting-edge science presented in a way that has relevance to participants from the breadth of the community; researchers, farmers, processors, veterinarians, advisers and consumers. Indeed, maximising the quality of the relationships between the different sectors will be a primary objective of this year's meeting. Scotland has a proud dairying heritage (Ayrshire cows are known around the world, and the Hannah Research Institute was a prominent dairy science institution for many decades) but we are very conscious of the global importance of dairying, so the meeting will be open (at no cost) to everyone as a blended meeting. If you can get there, please do, as face to face interaction is so important, but if you can't, then please participate by virtual online attendance. What is ***quality*** *dairying?* To some extent, answering that question is the real point of the Conference! As the industry evolves, one element that remains constant is the need for the highest possible quality in all that we do and all that we provide. Definitions of '*quality*' will also have evolved, hence the need for a re-examination of what '*quality dairying*' is, and could become. Milk quality is of prime importance, but there are additional factors to consider. Relationships between those who practice dairying, support it or benefit from it are complex. How can they be optimised? A significant barrier to high quality is '*wastage*', whether it be food wastage, resource wastage, environmental wastage, wastage due to disease or wasted opportunities. How do we reduce wastage? So, the strapline for the Conference naturally becomes: *Optimising relationships, minimising wastage, building quality.* From quality of life for the cow (buffalo, sheep, goat, camel…) to quality of the product for the consumer, all aspects assume significant importance. And of course, some consumers are also producers, so quality of life for the dairy farmer (researcher, veterinarian…) is also a relevant and important issue. If the relationship between the farmer and his various advisors is poor, then the quality of his business will suffer and in all probability his own health and welfare and that of his animals will decline. Decisions regarding the herd (nutrition, housing, reproduction management, culling, longevity, genetic progress…) will be less than optimal, and inefficiencies (wastage) will be introduced as a result. Many farmers will have little knowledge of, or input into, the ultimate destiny of the primary product that they produce. Without a better set of relationships between producers and processors, how can we produce milk in ways that maximises product potential along the food chain? Population demographics are changing, and one characteristic of the aging population is poor dietary choices that impact negatively on consumer quality of life. How can we maximise the quality and positive nutritional benefits of our high protein, calcium-rich product, especially when unscrupulous food companies wish to label it as nutritionally or environmentally inferior to their processed imitations ('alternatives', 'substitutes')? Are we wasting opportunities to add value whilst at the same time failing some consumers? Beyond the long recognised problem of antibiotic residues (usually well managed), can we be sure that all other characteristics of the milk that arrives at the creamery are appropriate (or preferably optimal) for processing, and that this processing is done in a way that maintains the quality right through to the end product and into the home. We have come a long way down the quality route during my lifetime (if you read my May 2023 Editorial you will understand what I mean), but that must not make us complacent. Consumers are both more knowledgeable and more responsive to negative as well as positive messages, and this is something that the dairy industry needs to turn to advantage, since it provides significant opportunity for a quality product like ours. To find out more about the Conference and to register your interest in attending, visit the Conference pages on the JDR Community website, at https://www.journalofdairyresearch.org/next-generation-dairying.html We look forward to seeing you in Edinburgh or online!

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