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Dairy team-up leverages research towards healthy ingredients

By Stephen Daniells, 06-Feb-2009

A newly formed collaboration could see US industry, government, academia grasp the opportunities in dairy foods and ingredients, particularly for health and nutrition.

The newly formed National Dairy Research Program (NDRP) will see four partners work towards developing milk components as nutritional ingredients, bioprocessing of dairy to produce health and functional products, and ensuring dairy food safety.

"The NDRP will allow collaborative research that will provide new products and processes, addressing the overall health and wellness of the consumer while at the same time, reducing redundancies and creating efficiencies," said Gregory Miller, executive vice president of research, regulatory and scientific affairs at Dairy Management Inc., one of the participants.

Dr Miller told FoodNavigator-USA.com that the monies being invested have yet to be determined. *"Much will be defined by specific projects undertaken,"* he said.

Making up the quartet of NDRP participants are the National Dairy Council, the USDA-Agricultural Research Service (USDA-ARS), and the Department of Defense Combat Feeding Program – Natick Soldier Research, Development and Engineering Center (NSRDEC).

Program objectives are listed as improving the communication between the parties, decreasing or eliminating the duplication of research efforts, increasing collaboration on research projects and meeting the unmet needs of the consumer domestically and globally.

The US dairy industry has been under pressure from rising costs and competition from countries with heavily subsidized dairy industries.

"The program's industry partners expect the program will ultimately enhance domestic and global markets for US dairy producers and manufacturers," stated the NDRP.

The plan for this year includes expanding the industrial involvement, as well as exploring potential new research areas, and funding opportunities.

According to the program, product research and nutrition research priorities have already been identified. These are now being followed by a search for support and participation from industry associations, dairy processors and manufacturers, government organizations, and universities

"Regarding bioprocessing, the functional foods category continues to grow as consumers seek those food and beverage products that have some health implications," Dr Miller told this website. *"Examples of research that may be conducted, but not limited to, are projects that will enhance the functions of probiotic cultures in dairy foods and dairy bioactives in functional foods."*

In the area of nutrition research, the priorities will include obesity prevention, food composition and dietary guidance.

The NDRP was described as a *"research model for all agriculture"*, by Dr Joseph Spence, director of the Beltsville Area, USDA-ARS.

The US dairy ingredients market was estimated at €4bn in 2006, with annual growth of three to four percent, according to a statement by Campina CEO Justin Sanders two years ago.

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