



Women in Leadership



Their voices, ideas and vision for the future of cheese and dairy.

Kimberlee J. Burrington
is vice president of technical
development at the American
Dairy Products Institute

**Is there a product, service
or initiative you were
involved with launching at
the American Dairy Products
Institute or at University
of Wisconsin-Madison that
you're particularly proud of?**

I have a product and an initiative that I am very excited to talk about. One of the last products that I helped to develop at the Center for Dairy Research (CDR) was a dairy-based electrolyte drink, called Good Sport. Some of your readers already know about it because CDR and Good Sport have done a good job of telling the story. Some of the back story that hasn't been told is that back in 2012, our dairy ingredients group at CDR developed a dry mix beverage using milk permeate for the U.S. Dairy Export Council booth at the Institute of Food Technologists' annual conference. It was called a Dairy Mineral Thirst Quencher. We initially developed it thinking it could be a dairy-based Kool-Aid for kids, but after we generated a Nutrition Facts panel to include the naturally occurring minerals in it, we knew it was much more. The sodium content and potassium content immediately qualified it to be a dairy-based isotonic beverage like Powerade or Gatorade, and that is exactly how we positioned it at the show. The purpose of developing prototypes for food shows is to show innovative products that could be commercialized one day. Fast forward to 2017 when Michelle McBride, founder and CEO of GoodSport Nutrition, found CDR through a recommendation of a neighbor who was an ex-Kraft employee. She walked in with a ready-to-drink sports drink formulated with skim milk, and I knew immediately that what she really should be formulating with was milk permeate to make it a clear drink with naturally occurring electrolytes. I told her that I had been waiting a long time for someone to walk in the door saying they wanted to make a dairy-based sports drink.

The initiative that I am very excited about at ADPI is the membership that we have created for academic institutions. When I was at CDR, the students and faculty used me as a link to the industry for dairy ingredient samples they needed for research and product development contests. They also used me as a resource to find out what the

industry needs were for ingredients with improved functionality or how to use dairy co-products so we could identify gaps in the research and generate new research proposals. I also identified research gaps by finding that sometimes I couldn't solve some product issues with just formulation changes. When I started my new role at ADPI, I knew that other universities could also use those resources as well as all the technical resources that ADPI had. Because I have such a passion for students, I thought the membership would also bring them closer to the industry with hopes of attracting them to dairy careers. We just started the membership a couple of years ago and it was really triggered by Washington State University reaching out and asking if they could join ADPI. We are working on engagement with our academic institutions but we now have 30 university members. It's all about future-proofing the dairy industry, and we all need to work together.

**What leadership style do
you feel has garnered a
positive response throughout
your career?**

I think a good leader is approachable and a good listener. People want to be led but not directed. If you have taken the time to hire people who are passionate and have the expertise to do their jobs, then they will have lots of ideas to contribute to your team. Listen to them, implement their ideas, work as a team, and make sure that each member of the team has input and feels valued. Be a curious leader because curiosity is the key to innovation. A curious leader has an open mind about other people's ideas and opinions because it leads to healthier work relationships, better collaboration, fewer conflicts and ultimately a better work environment.

**How can the industry
motivate the next
generation of women to
pursue a career in dairy?**

This is a particularly tough challenge simply because there are fewer dairy farms every year and fewer women that grow up on dairy farms. I did not grow up on a dairy farm, but growing up in Wisconsin, I was surrounded by dairy farms and of course grew up in a family drinking milk and eating dairy products every day. I had relatives on farms and visited farms, so I knew where my food came from. We have a whole generation

of young people that don't know where their food comes from and maybe didn't grow up consuming dairy products. The goal of our academic institution membership is to attract more people to dairy careers. More of the students we attract will automatically be women because we are seeing higher enrollments at universities now of women than men. Some of our big dairy companies are talking with students at technical schools, high schools and even middle schools to start educating them about dairy careers. The dairy industry has many degreed and non-degreed positions, so reaching both types of women will be critical. Not that all women want to have families, but dairy companies will need to think about improving maternity and paternity leaves, helping with childcare options, leave for the care of aging parents and providing more flexible work schedules even for manufacturing jobs. Because the younger generation is more focused on environmental issues and being "better for the planet," we need to tell our sustainability story to young women and young people in general.

**Do you feel women
in the industry are
well-represented in trade
organizations, educational
content and the media?**

Yes, I am especially happy about the growth of women leaders within our industry over the last few years. Just this year, ADPI elected Mindy Berrey (Land O'Lakes) as the first female chair to the ADPI board of directors, and Patti Smith (Dairy America) is currently serving in an officer role as secretary. The inclusion of women in leadership positions within ADPI is higher than it has ever been as we currently have nine women who hold a seat on the ADPI board.

The Wisconsin Dairy Products Association also has its first female executive director with the appointment of Amy Winters. Barbara O'Brien, the first female CEO for Dairy Management Inc., has led the organization for almost two years and in February 2021, Krysta Harden became the first female and third CEO and president to lead the U.S. Dairy Export Council since its founding in 1995.

When I started my career in the dairy industry, it was still very much an "old boys' network," and there were not very many women in any trade organizations, much less on boards or in leadership positions. These women serve as great role models for the rest of us in the dairy industry.

**Did you have any mentors
in the industry, and how
have they helped you along
your career journey?**

I have been fortunate to have quite a few mentors. The first mentor of my career was Dr. Bill Haines, who I worked for at my first job at Ridgeview Industries, after my bachelor's degree. I worked on whey applications and enjoyed my work. I had expressed interest in returning to UW to get my MS in Food Science after only working there for a year. Bill talked the owner of Ridgeview, Mak Kronn, into funding a project to make a heat-modified whey protein concentrate that they were interested in. They paid for my MS but told me I could return afterward or go somewhere else to get a job. I got married and then headed to grad school to study with Dr. Clyde Amundson. After graduation, I got a job at the Keebler Co. and spent the next 10 years in the baking industry. I had my first child in 1990, while working at Keebler, and was one of two salaried women that they allowed to go part time for the first time ever. The second mentor that I had was Dr. Rusty Bishop. He hired me to start the whey applications program at CDR. By the time I started at CDR in 1997, I had two children and took the job because UW and Rusty permitted me to work part time. I maintained my part-time status for the 23 years that I served as dairy ingredient applications coordinator. Rusty was a great sounding board to help me vet out ideas, but he also provided an environment to allow me and my team to make decisions on our own. He worked with the Wisconsin Milk Marketing Board (now Dairy Farmers of Wisconsin) and Dairy Management Inc. to make sure we had funding, and he let us build a program to support whey manufacturers and end users. Also, during my time at CDR, Dr. Norm Olson (UW professor and founder of the Cheese Research Institute, the predecessor of CDR) and Dr. Bill Wendorff (UW professor) were both terrific mentors for me. Norm sent many emails or often dropped off a note of encouragement for something our group did that was written up in the media long after he retired from UW. Dr. Bill Wendorff passed on a couple of short courses that he started for me to take over shortly after I started at CDR and always supported me along the way. **CMN**