



# Women in Leadership



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

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## What do you think are the most important attributes of a leader, and how do you use your role to help direct, motivate and inspire your team and organization?

Developing trust and open communication is extremely important. When I began working at T.C. Jacoby, I knew nothing about this industry. Everyone I shadowed my first year was approachable and made sure that I felt comfortable asking questions. Having this foundation of trust and open communication allows people to feel heard and valued. They are more engaged, motivated and dedicated to their work. They also come in each day excited for what's ahead — and in our industry, there's always something new! At the end of the day, a strong team leads to a successful company.

## Do you feel women in the dairy industry are well represented in trade organizations, educational content and the media? Where do you see gaps?

When I started back in 2003 there were very few women in dairy trading roles. Today, the landscape has changed significantly, with many more women involved throughout the entire dairy sector. This shift is incredibly important, as diversity in leadership and decision-making leads to stronger, more well-rounded organizations.

If I had to pick an area that could benefit from more women, I would say trade. Women bring unique skills, perspectives and approaches to processing information, which allows for more “out of the box” solutions. I really enjoy applying both my analytical skills and my creativity when it comes to working with our suppliers and customers. As a family business, we plan to be around in another 75 years, and having a diverse workforce encourages creativity, strengthens problem solving and ultimately leads to better outcomes for the entire organization.

## Thinking of leaders and/or role models you have worked with in the past, what are some strategies you have learned from them and adopted, and what are some things you have tried to avoid?

While I learned a great deal about the industry from Ted Jacoby Jr. and Ted Jacoby III, my role model has always been my mother. She was a strong, highly educated woman — the driving force behind our successful family business — all while raising five children.

She instilled in me the belief that I could achieve anything I set my mind to and that I should never rely on anyone else to define my success. Her resilience and determination continue to inspire me, and I hope to serve as a role model for other women looking to make a difference and leave their mark on the dairy industry.

## Do you feel women in the dairy industry have equal opportunities for advancement relative to their male counterparts?

It is difficult to say that women have truly equal opportunities when there is still a significant imbalance between men and women in the industry. Many leadership roles and key decision-making positions are still predominantly held by men, making it harder for women to break into certain areas, especially in trade. However, progress is being made.

As more women enter the dairy sector — particularly in trade and other historically male-dominated roles — opportunities will continue to expand. With each step forward, barriers are being broken, and companies are recognizing the value of diverse perspectives in driving innovation and success. By encouraging and supporting more women in these roles, the industry can create a more balanced, inclusive and forward-thinking future for the next generation.

## Do you see more acceptance of and positions filled by women leaders in the dairy industry now than when you first started? If so, to what do you attribute this?

I definitely see more women in leadership positions now compared to when

I started in 2003. The dairy industry has evolved significantly over the past 20 years, expanding beyond domestic markets to become a truly global network. This increased international reach has not only created new business opportunities but has also contributed to a shift in leadership dynamics — one that has attracted more women to key roles.

As dairy markets have become more interconnected, companies are recognizing the need for diverse skill sets to navigate the complexities of international trade, logistics and regulatory compliance. The expansion of global dairy trade has required businesses to be more agile, innovative and culturally aware — qualities that have opened doors for women who bring strong communication, negotiation and strategic thinking skills to the table.

Another key factor is the emphasis on collaboration in international business. The ability to build strong relationships across borders — whether with suppliers, customers or industry organizations — has made leadership skills such as empathy, diplomacy and problem-solving more essential than ever. These are areas where many women naturally excel, positioning them as valuable leaders in an industry that thrives on global partnerships.

While the dairy sector still has room to grow in terms of gender diversity at the highest levels, the continued globalization of the industry is accelerating change. More women are not only entering leadership roles but are also serving as mentors and role models for future generations, ensuring that the industry continues to benefit from a wide range of experiences and perspectives.

## What do you think traditionally has been a barrier to women entering or advancing in the dairy industry? How have women worked to overcome these barriers and build more opportunities for new generations?

The dairy industry has long been built on generational, family-run businesses, with deep-rooted traditions in agriculture. For decades, these businesses have predominantly been led by men, passing leadership from one generation to the next; however, times are changing. More women are stepping forward, expressing interest and making their presence known in the industry.

This shift is not just about breaking old norms — it's about embracing the diverse skills, perspectives and leadership qualities that women bring to the table. As more women take on key roles, they are not only proving their capabilities but also reshaping the future of dairy, making it a more inclusive and forward-thinking industry.

## What can companies and organizations in the dairy industry do to further diversity, equity and inclusion in their hiring and career advancement practices?

The dairy industry offers a wide range of specialized roles, from market analysts and traders to sales representatives, procurement specialists, accountants and logistics experts. The skills required for these roles vary greatly and are not limited by gender or background — they are found in people from all walks of life. Companies that recognize this and actively seek diverse talent by utilizing multiple hiring strategies and recruitment channels will position themselves to attract the best in the industry. Ultimately, performance, dedication and loyalty — regardless of gender or ethnicity — should be the driving forces behind building a more diverse and successful workforce.

## Why is it important for team members to see diversity and representation at the leadership level to inspire and motivate them to advance in their careers?

I believe that having a diverse leadership team within an organization sends a powerful message to the entire company — that every voice is valued and heard. When leadership reflects a variety of perspectives, it fosters a culture of inclusion, where individuals feel empowered to contribute their ideas, opinions and expertise. For a company to truly thrive and remain competitive in an ever-changing market, it's essential to carefully consider all options and viewpoints.

By embracing diversity, it helps organizations ensure that not only are they making the most informed decisions, they also are laying the groundwork for long-term success. This approach allows companies to not only make a positive impact on the industry today, but also to position themselves for sustainable growth and success for many years to come. **CMN**