Farmers Forum 2020: Telling our story and engaging with our communities
Lee Cowan, Senior Communications and external Engagement Manager

1. What do the public think about us and what are the media saying about us?
2. What is DairyNZ doing to improve the perceptions of dairy
3. What role can each and every one of us play?

What do the public think about us and what are the media saying about us?

Public favourability remains in the high 50s, with 57% of people surveyed in October/November 2019 saying they have a favourable and very favourable impression of dairy (Perceptive Survey). We want it to be better of course, and it’s has been declining from a high of 71% in 2010.

Perceptions are important as they drive our consumer’s preferences, they drive policy setting, they impact on what people say and think about us, which in turn impacts on how proud we are of our role as food producers. They have a direct impact on our wellbeing – do we feel good about what we do because we have support, which could affect people wanting to stay in the sector or enter the sector. It can even impact on international impressions of NZ and how people view our country.

But a perception is just that. A perception. It’s not necessarily accurate. We often hear that there is a perception of a media beat up. Media about dairy, across all forms of media, has remained over 90% positive / neutral for almost three years now (Isentia media analytics). There is no media beat up. But there is a sensitivity bias. We are interested in articles on dairy, so are more likely to see media and then read/watch/listen and are more likely to have an opinion (as an expert) on that media coverage. Because we are likely to know more about dairy than the journalist, we often have strong opinions about the way something is written or presented. At DairyNZ we spend a significant amount of time correcting misinformation, building relationships with journalists (and hopefully educating them), pitching stories that media may want and working to a deliberate and detailed media strategy.

What is DairyNZ doing to improve the perceptions of dairy?

We have had a three-pronged strategy in place since 2017 – and it’s gaining traction.

Firstly, community engagement – how are we having meaningful conversations with the public about dairy. Much of this work sits in the PR and media space to create engaging, interesting and topical content that media will promote.

We also sponsor other people and organisations that deliver work that we believe will improve perceptions (AgProud, Open Farms etc), as well as deliver speaking opportunities and engage with influencers.

In the last year we have written almost 300 stories for media (see DairyNZnewlink.co.nz), published 130 Inside Dairy articles reaching 14,200 readers. Just under 10% of all dairy media coverage comes from DairyNZ – which makes us one of the largest suppliers of stories to media. From 1 June 2018 to 31 May 2019, we managed 775 proactive and reactive media contacts.

Secondly, pride and empowered commentary. How can we activate and empower others to say good things about dairy, so we’re building a strong supporter base of people who understand and appreciate the exciting NZ dairy story. We’ve done significant work to educate media, politicians and influencers so they understand the facts about dairy and the NZ-context of how we farm? and how we care for people, our animals and our environment. We’ve created tools for farmers and have supported farmers to
engage with their communities and tell their stories. We’ve even created easy tools for media; www.dairynznewslink.co.nz; so media can access factual, interesting and engaging dairy stories.

And finally, with the NZME group, we have created an exciting campaign; the Vision is Clear. This campaign is running across the country, targeting the public, to talk about how we can collectively all work to have better water quality in our waterways, and how dairy is leading the way. The campaign has been running for just under 18-months and so far over 300,000 people have been to the website, over 500 print ad and 70 articles have run, over 161,000 have engaged with The Vision is Clear on social media, over 5 million people have watched our videos, and 1.57 million have heard one of the thousands of radio adverts. But is it working? Yes – in our recent surveys, people who had heard of the vision is clear are more likely to acknowledge they have a role to play in looking after waterways, and are more likely to have a positive impression of dairy farmers.
What role can each and every one of us play?

What people think and say about the dairy sector and farmers (ie our reputation) is often based on trust and credibility. If you think about who you trust and think about where you get your information from, what comes to mind first is often your friends and family.

Trust in media and institutions has been on the decline in NZ (Accumen-Endelsen Trust Barometer) for some time now. Have a think about where you get information from? Is it fair to say that you are more likely to remember a story from a trusted source (a family-member or friend), whether it’s factually accurate or not.

To build public and community trust, we have to build personal relationships, and be authentic and proud of our farms, our animals and our sector. The best way to do this is to engage with those around you— they will pick up on your passion and they will pass it on. Whether it’s your family and friends, or your local school, church, sports club. Every interaction you have that builds an impression about dairy farming can make a difference. And you can do that through social media, through opening your farm gates, through media and stories, through video, through dinner parties, or even through chatting about what it’s like on farm to a person you meet who may not know.

Never underestimate the power of your story!

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