

BUILDing Dairy Scientists

Dairy West

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In July, the dairy industry came together to celebrate National Ice Cream month. Through a campaign called "Scoop it Forward," their goal was simple: surprise people with a "random act of ice cream—just because—and encourage recipients to do the same."

Training the next generation of dairy scientists and technologists is an ongoing priority for the Western Dairy Center (WDC), a center focused on dairy research and a new priority to develop and train the future workforce for the regional dairy industry that has grown significantly in the past 10 years.

The dairy industry has become extremely competitive and many companies are looking to increase innovation and introduce new products to the marketplace. Also, passage of the Food Safety Modernization Act in 2011, created a need for additional trained people to enhance quality programs in dairy and other food companies. These efforts to increase innovation and quality development require technically trained individuals who understand milk, food science, and dairy products.

The WDC is housed at USU and directed by Donald McMahon, professor in the Department of Nutrition, Dietetics and Food Sciences. The WDC is one of six regional dairy centers established through the dairy check-off program in 1987 (a fee farmers pay to support dairy research that is based on the amount of milk they sell) and has been a training ground for dairy scientists and technologists. But beginning in the late 1990s, the center began losing funding, and the number of students coming out of WDC significantly declined.

USU alumnus Eric Bastian, who led the Research & Development team at Glanbia Nutritionals for 18 years and hired many WDC graduates, became acutely aware of

the decline in dairy scientists as he was trying to fill roles that were often open for a year due to lack of candidates. He also found that recruiting students from the Midwest or eastern part of the U.S. didn't fully compensate for the need, especially when many of those people returned "home" after a few years of working.

In 2012, McMahon and Bastian co-founded the BUILD Dairy (Building University and Industry Linkages through learning and Discovery) program under WDC. In the beginning, the program was solely funded by Glanbia Nutritionals, but in 2016, the United Dairymen of Idaho, now Dairy West, decided to tackle the problem from within the organization. Dairy West hired Bastian to develop the BUILD Dairy program, revitalize the WDC, and initiate a pipeline of technically trained talent that could be hired into the regional dairy industry. Discussions among dairy processors and universities that comprise the WDC produced 25 research priorities, and a call for proposals went out to WDC universities: USU, University of Idaho, Washington State University, Oregon State University, Brigham Young University (Provo), and Boise State University.

In 2017, Dairy West contributed \$1.5 million in check-off funding while Bastian and McMahon were able to raise an additional \$600,000 of industry and university co-funding, bringing the overall investment to \$2.1 million. This funding resulted in 19 new dairy research projects with 19 new BUILD Dairy graduate students who are currently being trained in the program. The 2018 investment increased to \$2.3 million, adding 17 more graduate students and 21 undergraduate researchers to the program.

BUILD Dairy is unique in many ways. Its focus on student training and the research, though important, is secondary.

Professors who submit research proposals are asked to identify students with local ties who, once trained and hired, will be happy to stay in the region.

BUILD Dairy's goal is to have trained 100 undergraduates, 75 master's degree students, and 15 Ph.D. students in the next 5 years, with the expectation that most of them will be hired into the region's dynamic and growing dairy industry.

Learn more about Dairy West [here!](#)