



“You are at a recruitment fair. Convince the young people attending that entering the UK dairy industry would be a good career choice”

Why work in the UK dairy industry? This question is extremely important to me as it was a question I faced myself at the age of 16 when deciding on my career path. Having a career in the UK dairy industry has given me so many opportunities such as travelling extensively and meeting like-minded individuals. Steve Jobs, the late founder and CEO of Apple Inc., once said, “Your work is going to fill a large part of your life, and the only way to be truly satisfied is to do what you believe is great work. The only way to do great work is to love what you do.” Working in the dairy industry has demonstrated this to be 100% true. A farmer is required by each member of public on a daily basis to put food on the table, this cannot be said for most other industries worldwide.

The UK is the thirteenth-largest milk producer in the world, with milk accounting for 16.4% of total agricultural output in the UK in 2020¹. Whilst the number of dairy cows in the UK has decreased the average herd size and yield per cow has increased by 100% since 1975.

The UK dairy industry is a large sector of the UK Economy, employing ~70,000 people in various jobs on farms and processing sites². Behind all the dairy products in the supermarket we see numerous roles contribute to getting those onto the shelves. Farm workers, breeding advisors, veterinarians, processing technicians, tanker drivers are just a few of the jobs needed for the cohesive running of this industry. The potential to work your way up in the dairy industry is practically limitless with numerous people holding managerial roles, having started at entry level with little or no qualifications. Formally the Dairy industry was a male dominated industry with few opportunities available for women. Nowadays women hold a firm place within the sector, with equal opportunities. The veterinary profession is a prime example, with many graduates being female & excelling in their field.

Mental health is an issue that is estimated to affect 1 in 6 of us today³. There are several studies examining the direct and indirect benefits of interactions with animals including instilling our human nature to care for others and encouragement of physical activity⁴⁻⁵. Interacting with animals has been shown to decrease levels of cortisol (a stress-related hormone) and lower blood pressure. Other studies have found that animals can reduce loneliness, increase feelings of social support, and boost your mood⁶. For me personally there is nothing that makes me smile more, than watching a new-born calf enter the world. The UK Dairy industry is not just all business. The social calendar is bustling with events, shows, tours & talks to attend. Holstein Young Breeders has been a big part of my social life and has taught me a great deal directly and indirectly. From public speaking skills when giving stock judging reasons, to learning to work within a team at rallies and shows.

There is no other industry with such camaraderie throughout the UK and worldwide. Employees within the dairy industry have a great responsibility for safeguarding the welfare of dairy cattle. Animal welfare is based on Five freedoms: freedom from hunger and thirst, freedom from discomfort, freedom from pain, injury, and disease, freedom to express normal and natural behaviour and freedom from fear and distress. The UK has some of the most comprehensive and robust animal welfare standards in the world with practices such as tail docking and tethering of calves prohibited⁷⁻⁸. Most dairy farms in the UK are part of a voluntary welfare scheme, such as red tractor, and many supermarket milk contracts have stringent ‘higher welfare’ codes of practice. Every role within the industry is a piece of the jigsaw which ensures dairy cattle in the UK are given the best welfare. This is something to be proud of and should give all employees in the sector great job satisfaction.

¹ Uberoi, Elise, House of Commons Library. 9 September 2021, UK dairy industry statistics

² DairyUK.com, 2022. The UK Dairy Industry

³ Baker Carl, House of Commons Library. 13 December 2021. Mental health statistics: prevalence, services and funding in England

⁴ Jasmin Jau & David Hodgson, 2018. How interaction with animals can benefit mental health: A phenomenological study, Social Work in Mental Health

⁵ Shoesmith, E et al. 2021. The Influence of Human–Animal Interactions on Mental and Physical Health during the First COVID-19 Lockdown Phase in the U.K. Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health 2021,

⁶ Newsinhealth.gov, 2018. Power pets Health Benefits of Human-Animal Interactions

⁷ Richard Vecqueray, Evidence Group Philip Hambling, NFU, 2018. NFU FARM ANIMAL WELFARE GLOBAL REVIEW SUMMARY REPORT

⁸ RSPCA, 2018. RSPCA welfare standards for dairy cattle



The UK dairy industry is no longer a 'wellies only' sector, whether you're creating algorithms or feeding cows. New technologies have exploded in the market and continue to emerge. Products such as collars measuring cows' activity and rumination have improved productivity and efficiency and over 35,000 robotic milking systems are operational worldwide⁹. Genomic testing dairy cattle has revolutionised the breeding sector by expediting selective breeding. Discoveries such as immunity + has helped breed a more disease resistant cow and ecofeed which aims to breed cows with a better feed efficiency & therefore reduce costs & carbon footprint. However, the uptake of technology has been slow, a study by DEFRA (2013) highlighted that 45% of farmers would be inclined to use computers for their business should they have better computer skills¹⁰. The skills gap between farmers and technology could be bridged by skilled industry workers enthusiastic about engineering and technology.

The environment and global warming are a topic of conversation across the world with agriculture and cattle getting some bad press. In the United Kingdom agricultural emissions are placed at 10% of the nation's greenhouse gases footprint, with the dairy farming emissions estimated to account for less than 3% of the total footprint, a small fraction compared to other sectors such as Transport (27%), Energy (21%), Business (17%) and Residential (15%)¹¹. Many environmental activists would claim that reducing dairy production and consumption is the only way to combat their contribution to greenhouse gases but there are many options to reduce emissions whilst still including dairy products in the UK diet. The dairy roadmap was founded in 2008 with 3 main aims; to improve the environmental footprint across the entire dairy supply chain, to strive for environmental best practice, innovation and compliance and to maximise the social and economic benefits for the UK dairy sector from these improvements. Since 2008 the industry has made vast progress for example, 95% of site waste is recovered or recycled¹². In 2015 the UK Government committed to delivering a target of net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050¹³. Delivering this within the dairy industry will require new and innovative ideas across all sectors from creative and skilful minds that are passionate about the planet.

In summary, the UK dairy industry is a vital part of the UK economy and lifestyle. It is not a 'one size fits all' industry, with positions for all skill sets and passions available. The acronym; PERFECT (Table 1.)¹⁴ describes the varying opportunities available in the industry and hopefully attracts people from inside and outside agriculture into a career to suit them.

Table 1. Dr Hlami Ngwenya's PERFECT opportunities in agriculture (2019).

	Career Opportunities
P	Policies
E	Education and training
R	Research
F	Finance and Farming
E	Extension and advisory services
C	Communication
T	Technologies and Trade

The future of dairy farming will rely on the generation of today ensuring the long-term security of UK food and farming. It is an industry full of key workers with a career for everyone regardless of ability. It has great potential to expand and develop massively by giving the right people the right opportunities. In order to do this, it must overcome environmental pressures, changing consumer trends and a shifting market via a different way of thinking.

If you are driven about where your food is produced, enthusiastic about innovating new technologies and compassionate about animals & the environment: the UK Dairy Industry needs you.

⁹ Dairy-cattle.extension.org, 2019. Dairy Robotic Milking Systems – What are the Economics?

¹⁰ McConnell, Dr Debbie, August 2017. Digital Dairy: optimising the value of precision technology in the UK dairy industry

¹¹ Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy, 2021. 2019 UK Greenhouse Gas Emissions, Final Figures

¹² AHDB, 2008. The UK Dairy Roadmap

¹³ COP21paris.org. 2015. Whats new in 2015?

¹⁴ Peltzer, Clare. 2020. Attracting Youth into Agriculture Developing a strategic framework to encourage young people to pursue a career in agriculture