June was Dairy Month and Jefferson County celebrated on June 2 with a Dairyland Festival at the State Office Building and Dairyland Parade that evening. In addition, I asked our Extension staff to fill out a Dairy Products Consumer Survey. We have a cross section of programs and educators here, including 4-H Youth and Camp Wabasso, Community Development, Military Families, Gardening, Local Foods, Nutrition, Parenting, and, of course, Agriculture.

I was interested to see what their answers to the survey would be and I was both surprised and not disappointed. There were 15 responses and not all answered every question. Some questions had multiple comments.

The first question was, “Last time you visited a farm?” I was not surprised that 67% had visited a farm in the past month. What was surprising was that 20% have never even been to a farm. Jefferson County just had “A Day at the Farm” and many neighboring counties and farms have events open to the public. Time for a road trip!

The next answers to the question, “How close have you ever been to a cow?” only mildly surprised me. Forty-four percent (44%) have touched a cow and an additional 37% have milked one. Six percent (6%) have only been as close as in their car.

Then we got into the What, Where, and Why of consuming dairy products. What: Eight different dairy products were mentioned with milk, yogurt, cheese, and ice cream evenly comprising 83% of responses. Ricotta garnered 1%.

Where: The time and place everyone consumed their favorite dairy products was not unexpected. Breakfast time was tops with 35% of the time. At dinner/lunch, with cookies, or out at the local ice cream stand evenly split amongst 36%. Seventeen (17%) say they can have dairy products anytime, anywhere!

Why: Fifty-two (52%) of the Extension educators liked the taste of milk and 48% favor dairy for its nutritional value of calcium, protein, and vitamin D.

Next they were asked, “What do you think is a fair price for milk and what is too much?” Milk must be priced correctly since 88% stated that $3.00 to $3.50 a gallon was the right price point. (The dairy farmers continued...
share is about half of that cost.) Seventy-seven (77%) said if milk gets to $5.00 a gallon they would have to think differently about purchasing.

When asked, “Who do you trust with information about your food?” the farmer is the most trusted source of information about our food at 23%. Research papers, CCE, investigation on their own, and USDA comprise 18% each. Six (6%) say they don’t trust the government. I interpret these numbers to mean that the farmers and processors along with the USDA and FDA are doing a great job in keeping the US food supply the safest and most plentiful in the world.

When asked to describe “a positive and a negative dairy industry image,” the answers were identical – consumers want to see clean cows, a clean farmstead, and clean farmers.

And finally when describing “in one word the work of a dairy farmer,” 71% indicate they think the farmer’s job is hard, labor intensive, and difficult. But 23% say dairy farmers and their families are dedicated to the work and the lifestyle it brings.

Again, we would appreciate your participation in this anonymous survey. Please click on the QR code on the first page or visit https://cornell.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_72nU1lkk5ZjdCvj.