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Summit makes dairy industry a shared global experience

Sarah Stanley says attending last year's World Dairy Summit was a great opportunity to learn more about the dairy sector right across the globe.

"It was really fantastic to learn about the different perspectives," says Stanley, who is the policy and operations officer for Dairy Farmers of Prince Edward Island (PEI).

Just how different? During her four days at the international gathering, Stanley heard presentations from the developing world, ranging from farms where the numbers of dairy cows can be counted on one hand, to a farm where 80 to 100 calves are born every day.

The International Dairy Federation summit, held in Chicago in October 2023, marked the 120th anniversary of the event. It attracted more than 1,240 delegates from 55 countries with sessions on innovation, production, sustainability and food security.

It was the first time the summit had been held in North America in over 30 years. When Stanley learned that many of her counterparts in dairy organizations across the country were planning to attend, she realized she needed to be there.

After a green light from the Dairy Farmers of PEI, Sarah found funding support through the Business Development Program Initiative, part the federal-provincial Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership.

While her job allows her to view the industry through a provincial and Canadian perspective, Stanley says the summit let her learn first-hand about the perspectives of other dairy-producing nations around the world.

And while the PEI dairy industry is an admittedly small player on the global stage, she says many of the topics covered had a familiar ring. They included the future of the industry, trade, rising costs, corporate concentration, sustainability and climate change.

Delegates to the international summit represented every facet of the dairy industry, including producers, processors, researchers, marketing and support staff, and government officials. Tom Vilsack, the United States Secretary of Agriculture, attended every day.



Sarah Stanley, Policy and Operations Officer for the Dairy Farmers of PEI, attended the World Dairy Summit held in Chicago in October 2023.

"It was so enlightening to have all the different perspectives represented on the various issues," says Stanley. "You don't often get the opportunity to have all the players in the same room."

Stanley says she was particularly moved by a presentation from a Kenyan woman, who began farming with one cow and grew her business to include other women in larger-scale milk processing.

"This woman visited women in the countryside and explained to them that owning one cow would give them the opportunity to bring money to their family."

Stanley also visited Fair Oaks Farms in Indiana, a multi-generational family farm that offers dairy, pig and crop adventure tours, an orchard, family programming throughout the year, and even has a hotel on site.

"They have really taken agriculture awareness and agritourism to the next level," she says. "They get about 500,000 visitors a year."

When Stanley returned to PEI, she shared what she learned at the summit with the Board of Directors of Dairy Farmers of PEI, as well as with some individual producers.

"I came back enthused about agriculture and the importance it plays in the world economy," she says. "I feel really lucky to be a part of this industry."