

State of Women in Dairy



IDFA
International
Dairy Foods Association

2024 Report

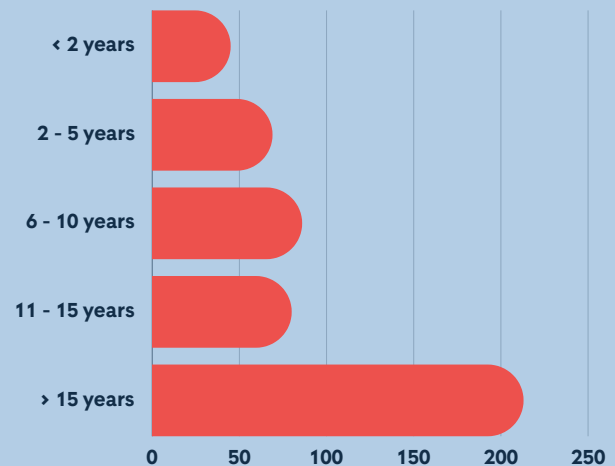
About the Study

The 2024 State of Women in Dairy survey was conducted by the International Dairy Foods Association (IDFA), Washington, D.C., between Oct. 17 – Nov. 7, 2023, to establish gender equality benchmarking data for the U.S. dairy sector and develop recommendations for possible industry actions.

The survey was conducted online among a sample of 548 professionals across the dairy industry—396 women and 152 men of varying ages, job functions, and lengths of experience in the global dairy industry, including those working for processors, farmer cooperatives, farms, retailers, and suppliers. Collection of demographic data including age groups, length of experience in the industry, and job function were used to represent these segments of the dairy industry workforce.

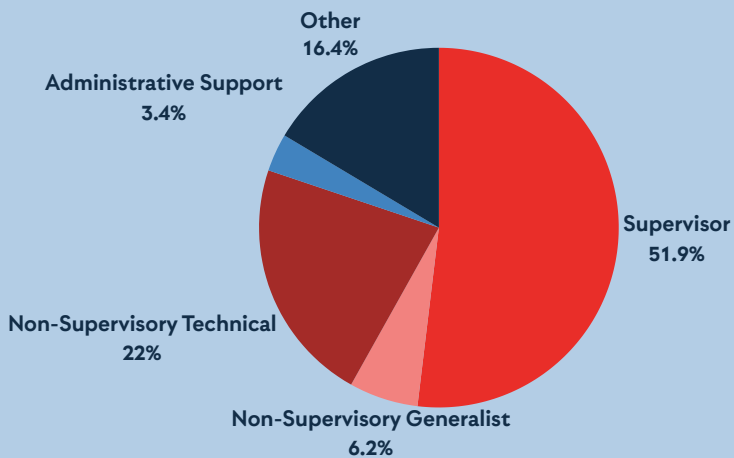
The survey focused on three categories of questions: demographic data, experiential responses, and policy-based responses. The survey included both quantitative and qualitative questions for responses, with the latter focusing on perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes. Statements describing experiences working in the dairy industry were taken directly from long-answer responses submitted to the online survey.

Years Experience



548 Responses

Job Function



A similar, less comprehensive survey was conducted by IDFA in early in 2023 to gather insights which were used to calibrate this more comprehensive State of Women in Dairy survey.



Executive Summary

Women in the U.S. workforce are better represented than ever before, moving into more management positions and earning higher salaries each decade. Yet, despite these ongoing gains, men continue to hold most jobs in manufacturing, earn higher wages for similar work, and represent approximately three-quarters of all management positions, according to the U.S. Department of Commerce¹. The same is true for the food industry, where approximately three-quarters of the industry's C-Suite is made up of men, according to research from Females in Food², a professional development community for women professionals in food.

As part of IDFA's ongoing strategic reviews and landscape assessments of the U.S. dairy industry, the trade association and its membership identified talent, workforce, and succession planning as significant priorities in 2019 and 2020. This led IDFA to develop a robust set of programs and educational opportunities for IDFA member companies, known today as the IDFA People Strategy, which focuses on continuous improvement across U.S. dairy. In 2020, IDFA introduced a new element to the People Strategy when it began offering training, education, conferences and events, mentoring, and professional development opportunities for women as part of new initiative called Women in Dairy. Today, more than 900 women and men—including top leaders in dairy—belong to IDFA's Women in Dairy network, and the initiative has launched dozens of mentoring circles, educational webinars, professional networking events, and a strong sense of community among women working throughout the U.S. dairy industry.

Through Women in Dairy, IDFA and its members are committed to improving gender equality in the dairy industry through data-based research and actions. The 2024 State of Women in Dairy survey and report are a direct outcome of this ongoing commitment.

IDFA's first annual State of Women in Dairy digs deep into the attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and policies affecting women employed throughout the dairy supply chain including adjacent industries. This first comprehensive report shows areas of progress and promise while revealing gaps that require change by leaders, organizations, and the industry. Areas of strength include the following:

- **Policies Are Widespread:** 83% of women surveyed say they are aware of their organization having policies or procedures in place that prohibit discrimination based on gender.
- **Flexible Work Schedules Growing:** 82% of women surveyed report that their workplaces offer flexible work schedules.
- **A Source of Advice:** 70% of women say people in their workplace regularly turn to them for advice when making importance decisions.
- **Opportunities for Advancement Are There:** 66% of women surveyed report being happy with the opportunities for advancement offered by their employers, while 22% are unhappy.
- **Women Want to Lead:** 55% of women say they want to be a senior leader while and additional 34% report already holding a senior position.

¹ U.S. Department of Commerce. Manufacturing Opens More Doors to Women. Oct. 6, 2022. <https://www.commerce.gov/news/blog/2022/10/manufacturing-opens-more-doors-women>

² Females In Food. <https://www.femalesinfood.community/>

Executive Summary

While these results demonstrate positive progress, the survey also revealed reported gender disparities, particularly in areas of career advancement, experiences in the workplace, compensation, mentorship, and overall company policies supporting women. Responses indicate women in the industry often feel overlooked, undervalued, underpaid, and that their ambitions may be misrepresented. The survey results also highlight a disconnect between men and women on these same factors.

Opportunities for change and improvement include:

- **Experiences in the Workplace:** Women report feeling less respected than male peers. Many have been mistakenly regarded as holding junior roles due to their gender.
- **Perceived Gender Pay Gap:** Women report experiencing a notable pay disparity, with 55% of women feeling that their gender has impacted their compensation unfairly.
- **Mentorship and Support:** According to those surveyed, there is a lack of effective mentorship and support for women, highlighting the need for more male allies in the industry.
- **Opportunities for Advancement:** Women report facing a variety of hurdles in advancing to leadership roles, with gender biases—historically and currently—playing a substantial role.
- **Policies and Goals:** While policies exist to promote equal treatment and inclusion in many companies, those surveyed feel their effectiveness is questionable, calling for a deeper cultural change.

Considering these and other results, IDFA proposes several recommendations for the dairy industry to address perceived gaps and disparities as illustrated by the survey:

- **Culture Development:** Set a clear strategy for cultural change that focuses on each company's unique needs and marks progress through data-based metrics. Directly engage executives and leaders across the organization to cultivate respectful and supportive company cultures with a focus on gender equality and more opportunities for diversity. Special attention to governance is needed, including effective policies and practices as well as greater commitment to having women leaders in the C-Suite as well as on Boards of Directors. More training and education across the organization, including about unconscious bias.
- **Leadership Programs:** Implement executive-led mentorship and leadership development programs with clear goals, consistent feedback, and timebound. These roadmaps should be intentional, offering clear direction toward reaching executive leadership positions within a company.
- **Address Compensation Equality:** Conduct regular compensation audits to help address pay disparities and transparently report the outcomes.
- **Effective HR Support:** Ensure HR departments are adequately staffed and resourced to effectively handle gender discrimination complaints and foster a supportive environment.
- **Family Leave Policies:** Expand family leave policies to support work-life balance.
- **Ongoing Research:** Continue the survey in the future for consistent monitoring and benchmarking.

Executive Summary

These measures aim to foster a more inclusive and equitable dairy industry, recognizing the important role that women perform and enhancing women's contributions at all levels. In addition to encouraging our members and the broader sector to utilize these recommendations, IDFA will use them to inform programming for the organization's Women in Dairy network, training and education opportunities for IDFA members, and programming at future IDFA events.

Key Takeaways

The IDFA State of Women in Dairy Survey focused on six key areas of impact for women in the U.S. dairy industry: their treatment, gender pay equality, mentorship/allyship/support, opportunities for advancement, factors in recruiting and retention, and anti-discrimination policies and gender equality goals.

1. The survey found a variety of perceived disparities between the treatment of women and their male peers. According to many respondents, age and gender combine to create an additional disadvantage for younger women that ultimately puts them several steps behind their male counterparts in career progression.
2. Much like in the wider manufacturing sector, the gender pay gap in U.S. dairy is real, and it is a significant added challenge to women already feeling disadvantaged in obtaining promotions.
3. Women in dairy report receiving less support from leaders within their organizations. Women feel that increased opportunities for mentorship, sponsorship, and allyship offered by leaders would help women advance.
4. Survey data indicated that women in U.S. dairy are at least as ambitious as men, but that they felt their gender plays a significant role, both past and present, in their ability to advance within the sector.
5. Promotion opportunities and flexible work schedules are critical factors to retaining women in U.S. dairy while men also indicate an interest in leaving the sector if promotion opportunities are not provided.
6. Anti-discrimination policies on gender are widespread, but their implementation and effectiveness are unclear to respondents who seek greater cultural change than written policies.



Recommended Industry Actions

The findings of this survey merit deep consideration among organizations in the dairy industry and suggest actions should be taken to better support women and improve gender equality in the dairy sector. While some challenges are not easily solvable in the short-term and may require multiple solutions and partnerships at multiple levels, it is important to begin that work now. Therefore, following the data and information gathered by the survey, this report offers a series of practical, viable recommendations to address these workforce issues through a collaborative matrix of industry-wide effort, company-level engagement, and individual respect that yield measurable results. IDFA recommends organizations and leaders throughout the U.S. dairy sector pursue the following actions in 2024⁵.

1. Develop a Company-Level Culture of Respect and Inclusion

Survey respondents' interest in company cultures that reflect and truly honor the policies they profess was clear: A company's authentic cultural commitment to respect and support, including through direct engagement from CEOs and C-suite executives across the supervisory chain, is a critical element in resolving the challenges facing many women in dairy. A company culture that respects and supports its employees is something that must be worked at consistently at all levels of an organization beginning with leadership, grounded in strong policies that are effectively administered, and understood and respected by employees. In other words, policies alone do not provide equality. As such, IDFA recommends company leaders implement intentional efforts to improve company cultures, including through⁶:

- Setting a clear strategy for cultural change that focuses on each company's unique needs;⁷
- Education across the organization about challenges faced by all genders, such as those identified in this report;
- Where not already implemented, training and education across the organization about unconscious bias and executive leadership efforts to maintain conscious awareness to avoid gender playing a role in decision making;
- Intentional efforts to support more opportunities for diversity in executive leadership teams and their decision-making, and clear alignment across company leadership regarding the business case for diversity in leadership;
- Encouraging employees to use their leave as allotted, implementing flexible work schedules, and helping managers understand the importance of the same;
- Ensuring policies and cultural changes are implemented in a manner that allows employees to come forward with concerns without fear of retaliation; and
- Implementing internal (and as needed, confidential) surveys of employees to facilitate executive leadership understanding of opportunities for improvement.

⁵ IDFA encourages companies to consult with counsel to ensure any company measures comport with the latest legal precedent.

⁶ This list is not exhaustive. One respondent noted their company had facilities with no female restrooms or locker rooms; implementing physical renovations to address such disparities may also facilitate company cultural improvements.

⁷ Reference: <https://hbr.org/2012/07/cultural-change-that-sticks>.

Recommended Industry Actions

Dairy leaders interested in showing measurable action of these changes may find it helpful to include cultural change as a performance objective in their own performance reviews, and/or as an established company-wide goal. They may also find it impactful to communicate about these objectives transparently with employees and seek their feedback regularly on the objectives and progress being made toward them. Others may join IDFA discussions on best practices in corporate culture change as facilitated through IDFA's HR Leaders or IDFA Board meetings or simply relying on their own dairy mentors and allies to guide them through cultural change.

2. Develop Structured, Executive-led Programs that Support Leadership Development

The survey results clearly show that women desire to be in executive leadership and there are enough women to hire for executive leadership in the U.S. workforce, and yet women continue to struggle with the "missing rung" on the career ladder, preventing them from reaching C-suites. Qualitative responses suggested that men may find it easier to ask for leadership opportunities, to accept opportunities as presented without questioning abilities, or be more welcomed into a primarily male environment, and that women may therefore find a more structured and transparent pathway to leadership helpful. Moreover, the data indicates that past practices may not doing enough to resolve the disparities women face in dairy, and that more intentional, structured support may be necessary. IDFA suggests this may be facilitated through:

- Structured programs where employees can be matched with mentors, including opportunities to be mentored by current and/or former executive-level leaders;
- Encouragement of executive leaders within companies to make themselves available to mentor or sponsor others within their organization;
- Education of executive leadership about sponsorship and the value it can bring to organizational succession planning;
- Greater opportunities for qualified women to become internal or external board or council members, to participate in developmental programs (e.g., IDFA's NextGen program), and to be selected for positions that provide new ideas and influence change;⁸ and
- Providing a transparent and published roadmap within companies to advancement and accessing development tools, whether through structured leadership development programs focused on talent development and succession planning, through clearly communicated advancement policies and procedures, or both.



⁸ In IDFA's own board member nomination process, it is noteworthy that the majority of individuals who declined board participation in 2023 were women, citing rationale such as being overcommitted or not knowing enough about IDFA. IDFA infers from these experiences that women may require additional support or encouragement to step into opportunities even when presented with them.

Recommended Industry Actions

3. Conduct Annual Compensation Audits, Transparently Publish Findings and Address Disparities

The data reveals strong sentiments that gender-based pay gaps are still a major problem for women in dairy. Leaders can remove the guesswork and assumptions from the situation by conducting internal annual audits of compensation as a matter of practice to determine with certainty whether equality gaps exist within their organizations. Where such gaps are found, corrective actions should be taken immediately⁹.

To the extent allowable by law, IDFA encourages companies to publish anonymized results of the audit. Results need not fully disclose actual or personal compensation packages, but rather transparent data related to findings of any particular salary or benefits that were discovered and any corrective actions taken.

4. Ensure the Existence of Competent, Adequately Resourced Human Resources (HR) Function that Provides Meaningful Support

At least one survey respondent indicated their company had no HR department available at all for the establishment of anti-discrimination policies, while several others felt their HR functions provided no support beyond processing paperwork. It is clear that a functional office is needed to write, publish, and implement policies such as anti-discrimination policies, and the lack of such functions is recognized by employees and may have a negative impact on performance and/or morale. The survey data makes clear that women need a known and trusted resource they can turn to within their organizations when they face discrimination or need guidance. Finally, IDFA considers the emerging landscape of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) policies to point clearly in the direction of significant future liabilities for companies that have no appointed HR function, related anti-discrimination policies, and evidence of programming to support their effective implementation.

U.S. dairy companies can simultaneously improve their support for women while avoiding such liabilities by ensuring they maintain a robust HR function, that it offers support and guidance beyond administrative paperwork, and that the HR function is adequately resourced to establish effective programming to support all employees, including women.

⁹ It may also be worth noting that one survey respondent suggested there is a need to also audit the equality of performance goals across genders due to the possibility that women may in some cases be taking on heavier workloads than men while maintaining a decreased probability of promotion and compensation due to their gender.

Recommended Industry Actions

5. Review and Consider Expansion of Family Leave Policies

The number of survey responses requesting greater support for paternity and maternity leave policies as well as flexible family policies was noteworthy and bears further reflection. Respondents' requests for improvements in family flexibilities and paternity and maternity leave were wide-ranging and achievable to implement:

- Ensuring paternity leave is offered in addition to maternity leave and that both are paid;
- Using any combination of tools to ensure maternity and paternity leave participants can take a full 12 weeks off, paid through paid time off, short term disability, or other flexible leave policies;
- Options to allow for extended maternity leave that holds positions available to returning mothers for up to 1.5 years, as is standard practice in other countries; and
- Flexible work schedules and locations that allow families to facilitate personal appointments as needed while still maintaining the committed number of work hours without reprimand.

As one respondent noted, other sectors are offering paid maternity and paternity leave, and if the U.S. dairy industry does not evolve, it will impact recruiting and retention longer-term. Additionally, if U.S. dairy as a sector professes a goal of gender equality, which should mean equality in both directions and a recognition that in fact, a comprehensive family leave policy may ultimately facilitate greater female engagement in the workplace.

Respondents also indicated prevalent negative attitudes toward maternity and paternity leave, e.g., that the leave is an assumption that a person may no longer wish to engage in his or her career or is no longer ambitious. They also indicated feeling pressure to return from leave too quickly to avoid such assumptions. In addition to reforming leave policies, companies may find it helpful to ensure an appropriate and respectful conversation is happening with leave candidates regarding the changing nature of their lives with respect to their career.

6. Continue the State of Women in Dairy Survey and its Benchmarking

Respondents made it clear that not only is this survey important, but that they expect expansions in future iterations. Some asked for the survey to include racial demographic data as well as questions about race-based employee experiences. Others asked for the survey to be offered in Spanish for those members of the U.S. dairy workforce that may have additional experiences but are unable to share them due to language and cultural barriers. Others asked for a better understanding of company size relative to respondent feedback to better understand the dynamics and outcomes. IDFA agrees with these suggestions, and with the sentiment that these results are just the beginning of understanding and addressing the problems related to gender equality facing the U.S. dairy industry. IDFA intends to continue the survey and subsequent reporting on the State of Women in Dairy to continue this data benchmarking in the future.



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About the International Dairy Foods Association (IDFA)

IDFA is a Washington-based 501(c)6 trade association that represents the nation's dairy manufacturing and marketing industry, which supports more than 3.2 million jobs that generate \$49 billion in direct wages and \$794 billion in overall economic impact. IDFA's diverse membership ranges from multinational organizations to single-plant companies, from dairy companies and cooperatives to food retailers and suppliers. Together, they represent most of the milk, cheese, ice cream, yogurt and cultured products, and dairy ingredients produced and marketed in the United States and sold throughout the world.