



IDF response to CFS-HLPE issues paper

Impacts of COVID-19 on food security and nutrition: developing effective policy responses to address the hunger and malnutrition pandemic

We have read with interest the CFS HLPE issues paper on the impacts of COVID-19 on food security and nutrition (September 2020). As the pandemic continues to undermine global food security and we all grasp with the new reality, we would like to share the perspective of the global dairy sector and how it has responded to the pandemic.¹

One billion people globally are directly or indirectly supported by the dairy industry. Most dairy is produced by small to medium enterprises that are an integral part of the local community. Although each part of the world faces its own challenges due to when the virus appeared or seasonality of food production, the sector has showed a real resilience in the face of this new reality.

Our dairy farmers and dairy processors as well as everyone else involved in the dairy supply chain have continued to work tirelessly to ensure there are enough nutritious dairy foods available for consumers around the world even in these very difficult times.

Sustained availability of dairy products

The document mentions that dairy, in contrast to grains, is more vulnerable to the impacts of COVID-19 in higher income countries and that the disruptions in supply chains for agricultural inputs could also affect food production going forward.

We disagree with this statement; to date there was no interruption of milk production during the pandemic. Milk production increased in several countries. In all countries, the dairy supply chain activities were recognized as essential. Notably, the dairy sector was not significantly affected by illnesses of farmers or employees involved in transportation, processing, and distribution.

Thanks to rigorous food safety practices, robust worker protections, and preventive measures in place on farm, in processing plant and in milk transport, the dairy sector experienced limited COVID-19 infections, and did not experience the subsequent challenges common to other sectors. Processing plants worked tirelessly to adapt to new demand quickly and the transporters and distributors ensured access to the same quality products at the retail level.

¹ The IDF recently surveyed its members to identify the impact of Covid-19 on the dairy sector. The survey collected data from 21 countries worldwide representing 55.2% of global milk supply.



Resilience of the sector

The sector has demonstrated real innovation and resilience to the crisis. In contrast to the report the retail milk prices were not significantly affected even during the early days of the pandemic. It should be noted that milk and dairy products are often discounted by retailers to attract consumers, but these fluctuations are not the result of issues in the supply chain.

It is true that the closure of restaurants and other food service facilities led to a sharp decline in demand for certain perishable foods, including dairy products. However, the increase in home consumption patterns resulted in an increase in retail demand that compensated partly or totally for losses in food services in many countries. This helped sustain the livelihoods of many dairy farmers.

The report mentioned that the pandemic generated lots of food waste and highlighting milk as an example. It is important to provide context and nuance to so-called “dumping of milk.” Very little milk was actually discarded during the pandemic, and this was quite a localized phenomenon. It was an exceptional situation that occurred in those few countries which were at the peak of the seasonal production.

For example, in the UK the milk that was discarded represented less than 1% of the whole milk production. This happened in the first few weeks of the pandemic and affected only a small proportion of farmers supplying companies with high exposure to food service. Even then, not all of the value of all of the milk was lost. In many cases all the cream was separated from the whole milk. The remaining skim milk was used in processes such as the production of energy by sending the milk into anaerobic digestion. Surplus milk above demand was also transformed into long life products and stored. Despite the media stories, only a small proportion of the milk was lost. After the initial early shock of the pandemic, the sector responded quickly and production was realigned, processing plants adapted to respond to the new demand and the industry partnered with Government to promote in-home consumption of milk and dairy.

Finally, dairy through its nutritional value and health benefits plays an important role in healthy diets especially for the most vulnerable. Stakeholders ensured these populations would still be reached and could consume dairy, either through increased donation to food banks or finding creative ways to continue the school milk programs even when schools were suspended.

Commitment of the sector

Billions of people around the world rely on dairy for nutrition daily. Dairy products are nutrient dense foods, supplying significant amounts of energy, protein, and micronutrients, including calcium, magnesium, selenium, riboflavin, and vitamins B5 and B12. Dairy is a staple food with traditions deeply woven into societies all around the world. The versatility and affordability of milk and dairy products allows for varied use and incorporation into various dietary patterns and across different cultures.

As well as providing first class nutrition, dairy provides jobs and economic security for many families.

The dairy sector continues its commitment to nourish the global population with safe and nutritious foods through sustainable production systems even in these exceptional times.