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IFCN Conference 2026



SEPTEMBER 27th – 30th, PARMA, ITALY

THE FUTURE OF GLOBAL DAIRY: EFFICIENCY, INNOVATION & COOPERATION IN A VOLATILE MARKET

From 27 to 30 September 2026, more than 200 dairy professionals, industry leaders, researchers, processors, farm input providers and farmers from around the world gathered in Parma, Italy, for the IFCN Conference 2026 under the theme “The Future of Global Dairy: Efficiency, Innovation & Cooperation in a Volatile Market.” For the first time, the entire IFCN network came together in one conference, creating a unique platform to connect global dairy data, farm-level realities, industry innovation and future market outlooks.

Understanding a More Volatile Dairy World

The conference opened with a strong focus on the current state of the global dairy sector, highlighting both the opportunities and risks facing dairy producers and processors. Participants explored global market developments, the Italian dairy sector, food security, nutrition and the increasing role of volatility in shaping business decisions.

Opening the conference, Łukasz Wyrzykowski, Managing Director of IFCN, emphasized the importance of turning reliable data into better decisions across the dairy chain and highlighted the need for efficiency, innovation and cooperation to navigate a rapidly changing environment.

During the session on Italian dairy, Alberto Menghi from CRPA demonstrated how Italy creates value through processing and premium cheeses. He highlighted that the country's future competitiveness depends on exports, adding value and addressing challenges such as labour shortages and water availability.

Global market discussions underscored growing volatility driven by climate, geopolitics and changing economic conditions. According to Hubertus Gay from the OECD, long-term developments are increasingly shaped by climate and population trends, while short-term fluctuations are becoming more difficult to predict. His message to the industry was clear: "Embrace volatility."

Andrea Lendewig, Head of Research & Development at IFCN, presented the latest global dairy market developments, highlighting that the exceptional milk supply growth seen in 2025 has started to lose momentum in 2026 as drivers are no longer aligned. While dairy demand remains supportive and increasingly diversified, climate risks, weaker farm economics and geopolitical uncertainty are making market volatility a permanent feature of the industry.

Addressing dairy's role in society, Pietro Paganini argued that the industry's challenge is not milk production itself but communicating its value. He stressed that dairy plays a critical role in food security and nutrition, noting that consumers often underestimate its broader societal contribution.

Deepak Dubey and Mohammad Al Rifai from Kemin demonstrated how precision nutrition can improve dairy farm profitability and resilience. By optimizing feed efficiency, balancing amino acids and improving nutrient utilization, farmers can increase productivity while reducing nutrient losses and environmental impacts.

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The day concluded with a panel discussion on volatility and future opportunities. Participants agreed that businesses must plan for the long term while remaining flexible enough to respond to short-term disruptions. As Alberto Menghi stated: "Farmers and processors need to plan for the next 10 years, while recognizing that market volatility will continue."

From Global Trends to Farm-Level Solutions

The second day shifted the focus from markets to dairy farms and value chains around the world. Experts from Latin America, Africa, Asia and Oceania shared experiences on how different regions are adapting to structural change, climate pressure and shifting market conditions.

Katrin Friedrichs and Gabriel Sarmiento from IFCN presented a global overview of dairy farming systems, highlighting how different farm structures, cost levels and resources create unique opportunities and challenges around the world. Their analysis showed that while dairy farms follow different development pathways, long-term competitiveness increasingly depends on productivity, efficiency and the ability to adapt to structural change and market volatility.

Hugo Quattrochi highlighted how dairy sectors across Argentina, Uruguay, Chile and Brazil are evolving through consolidation, intensification and changes in processing structures. While each country follows a different path, he emphasized that competitiveness depends not only on farm productivity but also on efficient processing, market access, infrastructure and stable business conditions.

Paidamoyo Chadoka presented Zimbabwe's efforts to build a more resilient dairy industry through investments in water security, renewable energy, genetics, feed efficiency and climate-smart technologies. Despite strong growth potential and available processing capacity, she stressed that expanding the sector will require greater investment, supportive policies and improved access to finance across the dairy value chain.

Discussing Vietnam's dairy industry, Tieu Duc Viet shared a positive outlook despite challenging climatic conditions: "Vietnamese dairy farmers are optimistic. They are prepared for high temperatures and continue to find practical ways to adapt dairy farm conditions."

From New Zealand, Matthew Newman reflected on the evolution of one of the world's most competitive dairy sectors. While New Zealand has achieved impressive gains in productivity, he emphasized that future growth must increasingly come through value creation rather than volume expansion. "The lesson from New Zealand is not that every region should farm like New Zealand. Every region should understand its natural advantages, protect them, and build value around them."

In discussions about sustainable development, Ernesto Reyes from the Global Dairy Platform highlighted dairy's broader role in creating jobs and improving livelihoods. He stressed that dairy's contribution extends far beyond the farm gate and reminded participants that: "Employment is the most important indicator to achieve resilience."

Pietro Baldrighi shared the perspective of Italian dairy farmers operating in an increasingly volatile environment. He highlighted challenges such as climate change, water availability

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and generational renewal, while emphasizing that innovation, investments and efficient resource management are essential to maintain competitiveness and create long-term value in dairy farming.

The President of Granlatte Granarolo Group, Simona Caselli, demonstrated how cooperation can help farmers create value beyond commodity markets. She explained how the cooperative model supports farm profitability, sustainability, innovation and resilience by connecting farmers, processors and consumers while ensuring that added value is shared across the dairy value chain.

Then it was explored how companies are supporting efficiency, resilience and sustainability through innovation. Speakers from Alltech, Bayer, Lallemand, smaXtec and Cargill demonstrated how better data, technology and collaboration can improve decision-making across the dairy supply chain.

Reflecting on future industry cooperation, Tara McCarthy introduced the concept of "coopetition", describing it as a combination of cooperation and competition, while emphasizing that "coopetition requires trust."

Patrick Gerlich from Bayer highlighted that farm efficiency starts long before milk is produced. He demonstrated how genetics, crop management, feed quality and agronomic innovation work together to improve productivity, profitability and sustainability. He emphasized that meaningful progress requires collaboration across the entire value chain because "sustainability starts before the cow eats."

Coming from Lallemand, Luis Queirós presented a whole-farm approach to sustainability, showing how improvements in silage quality, feed efficiency, nutrient recycling and food safety can reduce waste and improve resource utilization. He stressed the importance of practical solutions that create both environmental and economic benefits, noting that "we try to work with nature and not against it."

Charlie Sheppy from smaXtec demonstrated how real-time animal data can help farmers detect challenges earlier and make more informed management decisions. Using examples related to heat stress, he showed how better data can improve animal welfare, enhance productivity and increase farm resilience in increasingly challenging climatic conditions.

Celeste Grande from Cargill presented Herd Lifetime Productivity as a holistic approach to improving dairy farm performance. By combining nutrition, management, data analytics and long-term monitoring, the concept helps farmers unlock the genetic potential of their herds, improve productivity and make more effective business decisions across the entire production cycle.

The day closed with a strong consensus that efficiency, resilience and sustainability are increasingly interconnected, and that no single company can address future challenges alone.

Building the Dairy Roadmap for 2035

The final conference day focused on one central question: how can the dairy industry build a more resilient future while meeting growing global demand?

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A dedicated Kemin-IFCN Dairy Efficiency Session explored the links between farm profitability, sustainability and resource efficiency. Researchers and industry experts demonstrated how improvements in nutrition, feed efficiency and protein utilization can simultaneously benefit farmers, consumers and the environment.

Milica Kocić and Expedito Netto from IFCN explored how efficiency can strengthen the economic, environmental and social sustainability of dairy farming. Using global farm data, modelling and analysis been developed in IFCN, they demonstrated that improving productivity, feed efficiency and resource use can help farmers build resilience, reduce environmental impacts and create long-term value across the dairy supply chain.

Presenting long-term nutrition research, Michel de Haan showed that improving protein efficiency can significantly reduce nitrogen losses while maintaining animal performance.

In a joint session, Heather White, Kelly Nichols and Bram Pauwelyn demonstrated how improving feed efficiency and precision protein nutrition can create benefits for farmers, consumers and the environment. The speakers highlighted that optimizing amino acid supply and nutrient utilization helps improve animal performance, reduce nitrogen losses and lower environmental impacts while strengthening farm profitability, reinforcing the message that sustainability and efficiency must go hand in hand.

Discussions throughout the session reinforced that efficiency is not only about producing more milk, but about making better use of resources.

The conference workshop then brought participants together to co-create a Dairy Roadmap 2035, identifying priorities for efficiency, sustainability and long-term competitiveness. Throughout the discussions, participants emphasized the importance of reliable data, practical solutions and stronger collaboration across the value chain.

Looking ahead, the global dairy sector is expected to face a combination of slower milk supply growth, increasing climate risks and continued geopolitical uncertainty. The outlook presented by Milica Kocić and Erik Elgersma highlighted that while volatility is likely to remain a defining feature of dairy markets, strong long-term demand in many import-dependent regions continues to create opportunities for efficient and resilient dairy producers.

Eric Meyer from HighGround Dairy explored the recent surge in U.S. milk production, driven by herd expansion, higher milk components and strong processing investments. While production growth remains strong, he noted that rising feed costs, weather risks and changing market conditions may limit future expansion, making efficiency and profitability increasingly important.

Discussing the key consumer trends shaping future dairy demand, Tom Booijsink from Rabobank, highlighted the growing global demand for cheese and dairy proteins, driven by rising incomes, urbanization, convenience foods and health-focused nutrition trends. His outlook suggested that consumer demand will remain a strong driver of the dairy sector's long-term growth.

The conference concluded with an outlook panel session examining future milk supply, dairy demand and market developments. Speakers highlighted growing demand for dairy

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proteins and cheese, increasing climate risks, and the need for continued productivity gains to meet future market needs. Summarizing the role of efficiency in the future dairy sector, Patrick Gerlich stated: "Feed efficiency is the biggest lever on the farm." Meanwhile, Luis Queirós emphasized the industry's need to balance sustainability and profitability: "Nothing regarding sustainability matters if we cannot create a profitable environment."

Over four days in Parma, participants reached a common conclusion: volatility is no longer an exception but a permanent feature of the dairy industry. Future success will depend on combining efficiency, innovation and cooperation while creating value throughout the entire dairy supply chain. Reliable data, science-based solutions and collaboration remain essential for building a resilient and sustainable dairy sector capable of meeting the nutritional needs of a growing global population.

The IFCN Conference 2026 was hosted by Kemin and supported by leading organizations from across the global dairy industry.



About: IFCN is a global dairy research and consultancy network based in Kiel, Germany. Founded in 2000, it now brings together more than 100 researchers and provides expertise in the form of data services to more than 140 companies in the global dairy supply chain.

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