Idaho CAFE – Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What’s next for the Idaho Center for Agriculture, Food and the Environment?
A: The University of Idaho and CAFE supporters from agricultural groups, educational institutions and other interested parties are building public support for the project, helping raise money and contributing to more detailed planning. The selection of a site will be one of the next major steps.

Q: Will site selection include consideration of an existing dairy?
A: That option was considered but was rejected because of research requirements and the added costs created by demolition and rebuilding to match facilities with scientific needs. The associated cropland required for CAFE must be free from past dairy nutrient applications to allow researchers to do before and after nutrient application studies.

Q: Who conducted the feasibility study?
A: Rick Onaindia, of Onaindia Consulting, led the feasibility study team accompanied by Robert Matlick, Partner at Frazer, LLP and Pete Jones, CPA at France, Basterrechea, Wagner, & Bunn. The group has experience conducting dairy feasibility studies to determine the size, location and business considerations associated with commercial dairy enterprises.

Q: Why was 2,000 cows chosen as the optimum size for CAFE?
A: The herd size will allow CAFE to address environmental and economic sustainability issues. A single trial may require 250-500 cows. Thus, multiple research trials require large numbers of cows to obtain statistically valid results. The herd size is necessary for a large research faculty conducting multiple studies ranging from cattle nutrition to crop production. In addition, the herd size was chosen to resemble the size of a modern commercial dairy.

Q: How many staff and faculty will be based at CAFE?
A: The current plan calls for locating 12 to 14 existing and new faculty and staff researchers at CAFE to conduct studies and UI Extension activities. In addition, the dairy will require at least five herd and operations staff members. CAFE will rely on robotic milking, technology that is growing increasingly common on commercial dairies. In addition, any UI faculty will be able to utilize CAFE for research, teaching or outreach.

Q: Will CAFE have an educational mission?
A: CAFE will provide opportunities for students from K-12 to learn about dairies and agriculture through classroom visits and organized groups including UI Extension 4-H Youth Development and FFA. CAFE will encourage collaboration with a wide range of groups within Idaho and among research and agricultural interests nationwide. College undergraduate students from BYU-Idaho and the College of Southern Idaho will benefit from education and research experiences provided through CAFE in agricultural, animal and food sciences. CAFE will also provide an important training ground for graduate students to gain experience conducting research projects and addressing important issues affecting Idaho agriculture and communities.
Q. Why should the State of Idaho and the University of Idaho invest in a research dairy?

A: Agriculture is one of Idaho’s biggest industries and a strong economic foundation. Idaho’s dairy industry has grown dramatically over the past three decades, ranking as third or fourth nationally in recent years with cash receipts exceeding $2.2 billion and a total direct and indirect employment of nearly 51,000 jobs. CAFE provides a base to study the effects of dairies on both crop- and livestock-based agriculture, food-processing companies and communities.

Q: How much will CAFE cost?

A: Current estimates place the cost of CAFE at $45 million. The major costs include land acquisition, construction, purchasing a cattle herd and equipment. The Idaho Legislature appropriated $10 million for CAFE during the 2017 session, with another $5 million proposed during the 2018 session. Funding will be sought from agricultural industry members, from University of Idaho sources and other collaborators.

Q: The CAFE plan sounds familiar. Has it been proposed before?

A: More than 10 years ago, dairy industry and university leaders began working on forming a major research collaboration to address changes in agriculture created by the growing dairy industry. The Idaho Legislature appropriated $10 million to support that effort. Funding was withdrawn and reallocated during the Great Recession.