Livestock-based production accounts for over 60% of agricultural cash receipts in Idaho. In southern Idaho, dairy herds have tripled in the past 25 years, vaulting the state's milk production from 10th to fourth nationally. Idaho's food processing industry has paralleled this growth, expanding cheese and yogurt production.

Idaho CAFE will be the largest research dairy in the U.S. that will address animal agriculture and food processing challenges and opportunities nationwide. The center's mission will include examining the sociology of dairy industry and community relations, and business and economic factors. This approach will improve upon existing sustainable practices to support a profitable and environmentally sound dairy and food industry.

Key points:
- 2,000-cow dairy relying on advanced technology
- 1,000 acres of associated cropland
- Improve wastewater treatment and nutrient management systems
- Development of a food processing facility
- Facility will include laboratory space, offices for faculty and student housing

Frequently Asked Questions:

Q: What is CAFE's ultimate goal?

A: Research, education and outreach with the country’s largest research dairy to deliver an environmentally, economically and socially sustainable dairy production system in a semi-arid environment.

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 at CAFE to conduct studies and outreach 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 whether on-site or remote.

Q: What will the research, teaching, extension/outreach agenda look like at CAFE?

A: Together with numerous partners, the University of Idaho will lead research through CAFE to ensure the economic viability and sustainability of Idaho and its populace by enhancing Idaho's rural communities, ensuring Idaho's environmental sustainability, and inspiring food innovation, quality and safety.

The teaching goal is to build capacity for dairy operations and the food processing industry by increasing vocational training opportunities, expanding 2+2 opportunities with partnering institutions and developing four-year degree programs where students can receive their degrees without coming to the Moscow campus. These efforts will be in partnership with regional universities and all colleges at the University of Idaho will be involved.

Outreach/Education efforts will provide a window into all aspects of dairy/food processing by educating on the research conducted at CAFE. Educational programming conducted by UI Extension faculty will increase awareness and knowledge gain of dairy/food processing for all ages of the general public and will support the implementation of research results and best practices in Idaho's dairies.

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: Why in the Magic Valley?

A: Of the more than 600,000 dairy cows in Idaho, 400,000 are in the Magic Valley with an average herd size of 1,345 cows. Approximately 520,000 acres of irrigated farmland are devoted to forage production (corn and alfalfa) to feed these cows. Magic Valley is home to some of the largest dairy processing companies (Glanbia, Chobani) in the United States.

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, the University of Idaho and other collaborators.

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.