Cal Poly Dairy Products Technology Center celebrates 25 years with slate of events

By Aaron Martin

SAN LUIS OBISPO, Calif. — The California Polytechnic State University Dairy Products Technology Center (DPTC) celebrated its 25th anniversary here Oct. 25-27 with a full slate of events that recognize the program’s research and outreach efforts that have impacted the dairy industry over the last quarter century.

“It was a special celebration that in some ways was very nostalgic and other ways full of excitement for the future of the DPTC,” Tong says. “I am proud that we were able to take an idea and then 25 years later showcase the impressive array of education, training and research accomplishments of the DPTC. But even more, I am excited about the solid foundation we have established to do much more to serve our state’s and our nation’s dairy industry in the next 25 years,” says Phil Tong, DPTC director and dairy science professor at Cal Poly.

Since it was founded in 1987 as part of a growing national network of dairy research centers with funds from the dairy checkoff and support from dairy processors in California, DPTC has trained more than 3,000 people through its outreach programs, participated in hundreds of projects to develop technologies for individual dairy processors, trained hundreds of graduate students and secured millions of dollars for dairy technology and research that otherwise would have gone elsewhere, Tong says.

By the mid-1980s California’s dairy industry had seen significant growth and universities realized that universities needed to play a greater role in research and outreach to find the best uses for milk and ensure the dairy industry would continue to grow.

“Support for (university extension) — which was a main training ground — has continued to erode over the years, and dairy research centers have had to pick up that slack with training programs and symposiums to help the industry translate some of the science that goes into research,” Tong says. “That was the impetus to create the DPTC.”

In the last 25 years, Cal Poly’s dairy science program has grown from an undergraduate program to a renowned graduate program that has trained hundreds of dairy processors and plant operators who now play key roles across the country. And while researchers at the DPTC were busy training the next generation of dairy processors and developing new technologies, the dairy industry has continued to change.

“One big thing that has happened is the growth and development of the artisan farmstead cheese industry,” Tong says. “It’s not a big user of milk, but it’s still an important part of the industry. We need to make sure it grows in a healthy way and produces quality product.”

Tong says the DPTC was among the first programs to hold courses on artisanal and farmstead cheese production.

“One of our biggest impacts has been providing the training to help the industry grow in a healthy way,” Tong says. “(Artisanal and farmstead cheesemakers) are a difficult group to reach because they are all over the country, but we have made a significant contribution in helping to develop that end of the cheese business. The entire cheese industry has been lifted as a result because it shows we make more than traditional cheeses.”

Tong also notes that the growing recognition of the dry dairy ingredient global market has been one a change within the dairy industry in recent years.

“There is growing attention and interest in finding research projects and technology for exports of dry ingredients and other cheese products,” Tong says. “About 14 percent of all milk solids produced in the U.S. are now exported. We continue to work with individual processors to guide them in making products that fit the world market, and we also have an applications program where we develop new ideas and work with individual processors to formulate new foods and ingredients. These have been integrated into people’s food product thinking.”

Looking ahead to the future, Tong predicts a continued emphasis on the global marketplace.

Domestically, growing consumer interest in health and wellness also has led the DPTC to develop and modify products to make dairy foods with reduced fat, lower sodium and higher levels of protein.

When it comes to future of the DPTC itself, Tong says plans are in the works to raise funds to double the size of the existing facility at Cal Poly. The DPTC raised more than $7.1 million to construct the existing facility, which was completed in 1995.

“Without trained graduates coming out of the (DPTC) and filling positions to produce products and run plants, there may have been a big gap, so dairy producers and processors were very visionary to implement this system,” Tong says. “Now there’s a whole chain for producers to make sure the infrastructure is there for future generations.”

Cheese advertising numbers remain steady

WASHINGTON — Cheese advertising numbers remain steady with the previous reporting period two weeks ago, according to the latest National Dairy Retail Report released Thursday by USDA’s Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS).

Under conventional cheese, AMS reports 8-ounce block natural varieties of cheese this week were at a weighted average advertised price of $2.44, up from $2.39 two weeks earlier.

This week 1-pound block natural varieties of cheese had a weighted average advertised price of $3.69, up from $2.58 two weeks earlier.

Two-pound block natural varieties of cheese had a weighted average advertised price of $5.62, down from $6.07 two weeks ago, AMS reports.

For natural varieties of 8-ounce shreds, the weighted average advertised price this week was $2.10, down from $2.40 two weeks earlier, and natural varieties of 1-pound shreds were at a weighted average advertised price of $3.28, down from $3.60 two weeks earlier.

AMS says this week 1-pound natural varieties of conventional butter had a weighted average advertised price of $2.72, down from $2.81 two weeks earlier. CMN