



# Dairy specialists set to share cutting-edge knowledge

TotalDairy Conference 2023 will provide the perfect platform to share the latest tech and information focusing on ‘Meeting the needs of producers, consumers and cows’, and keynote speakers will be addressing a wide variety of topics that are linked to this year’s theme.

**D**elegates at TotalDairy Conference 2023 will hear all about a new cattle handling simulator and perhaps even get the chance to have a go, prior to its launch in early 2024.

University of Wisconsin–Madison’s Jennifer Van Os, an animal welfare specialist, hit on the novel idea after a series of on-farm visits where US producers were asked about the specific challenges they faced on their units. “A typical request was ‘can you help us train our staff to move and handle our cattle more humanely,’” she says. “I assumed that ‘best practice’ in this area was well established, so this really surprised me,” she adds. Further conversations revealed that, although the knowledge around humane handling is there, the practical application and the ability to practice cattle handling

was lacking. “These producers were, typically, managing substantial teams of staff, some of who were inexperienced at cattle handling. ‘Show, don’t tell’ was what they were looking for, particularly because, for many staff, English is not their first language,” explains Dr Van Os.

## Learning concept

“My father-in-law is a retired commercial airline pilot, and that got me thinking. Why not set up a cattle-handling ‘simulator’ – using the approach and tech that flight simulators use to train airline pilots? It’s a learning concept that’s easy-to use, accessible, safe, and it could also be fun.” Funding for ‘Mooving Cows’, a computer-game simulation, came from the University of Wisconsin–Madison’s Research Forward Initiative and Wisconsin Dairy Innovation Hub. Development of version

2.0, which can be played on a tablet or mobile phone, is in progress.

“It should be ready to launch in early 2024 and the plan is to make it available to everyone – not just producers and dairy staff,” says Dr Van Os.

“Research and development into tech like this – which supports cow and staff welfare – demonstrates to consumers that the industry takes herd health and welfare extremely seriously. And it also gives them an insight into the time, dedication and care that’s required when managing herds. It’s an extremely skilled job. So much so that a game, a simulator, has been developed to ensure that dairy staff handle cattle in a humane, low-stress and safe way. That’s an extremely strong message that we’ll be putting out there.” Dr Van Os has also recently finished a study comparing public versus industry





*Cow-handling simulation: game will engage dairy staff and consumers*

perceptions of cow-handling. This has been accepted for publication, and she will touch on the results during her presentation at TotalDairy Conference. “Inappropriate cattle handling not only impacts animal welfare, but it can also be a safety risk for staff. And, just as importantly, it also poses a reputational threat to the wider dairy industry,” she says. “To enhance social sustainability, handling practices must resonate with societal values about animal care. But it has yet to be determined to what extent industry and public stakeholders differ in their perception of common cattle handling situations.”

Her team carried out an online survey with a sample of dairy industry (IND) and public (PUB) stakeholders to examine how they perceive a variety of cow-handling scenarios, ranging from positive to negative, in terms of impacts on animal welfare.”

### Emotional response

Participants were presented with 12 brief videos depicting a range of realistic cow-handling situations, and responded to measures designed to assess their attitudes and beliefs about each scenario, their perception of the emotional response of the cows depicted in each scenario, as well as their own emotional response. Pre-existing beliefs about cow treatment on US dairy farms and demographic data, including self-reported dairy consumption, were also collected and analysed. Before viewing the videos, 52.9% of PUB (versus 79% of IND) believed cows were treated well, while 27.2% (versus 9% of IND) believed cows were treated badly. In both samples, participants with more positive pre-existing beliefs about dairy-cow treatment in the US reported

consuming dairy products more frequently. But the responses to the video clips were similar between the groups, and interactions between cows and humans that were viewed more favourably were also thought to be more common. “The consensus between industry and public stakeholders around dairy-cow handling practices observed in this study could provide a common starting point for addressing other, more contentious animal welfare issues,” says Dr Van Os, adding that she’ll be able to share more at the two-day conference in November. Kantar’s Ian Shipton, based at the market research company’s UK office, is another

keynote speaker not to be missed at the event. He’ll be sharing the findings of a recent survey into consumer trends around dairy produce. The organisation’s latest market research shows what really matters to the public when making dairy buying decisions – is it welfare, the environment or, when they’re faced with supermarket shelf choices, does it come down to price? His presentation will reveal more about consumer preference, and what steps producers and the wider industry can take to meet these demands.

### Time management

Other speakers to look out for are Michael Blanche, presenter of The Pasture Podcast, who will share his insights into time management. Producers are under increasing pressure on units to not only ensure the smooth day-to-day management of their herds, but also run their dairy businesses and make some time for a life outside or away from the unit. Also speaking will be Tom Tylutki, the co-inventor of the Cornell rationing system for dairy cattle (CNCPS) and CEO of Agricultural Modelling and Training Systems (AMTS). His talk will centre on how producers can balance feeding for productivity and profitability, while considering the environment and keeping emissions to a minimum. And he’ll also take a closer look at precision feeding of dairy cows, and the importance of fibre digestibility. |

## TOTALDAIRY //CONFERENCE

TotalDairy Conference 2023 will be held at The Crown Plaza in Stratford-upon-Avon on November 8 & 9. Tickets for producers are available at a discounted rate.

For more information and to purchase tickets, please visit [www.totaldairy.com/tickets](http://www.totaldairy.com/tickets), or scan the QR code below. Keep an eye on social media and TotalDairy Conference’s website for more announcements on speakers, or sign up to the event’s mailing list and ensure the latest news is delivered to your inbox. For more information visit: [www.totaldairy.com](http://www.totaldairy.com).



### Jennifer Van Os’ sessions

#### Presentations

- Why animal welfare is crucial to producers, cows and consumers
- Moving cows humanely

#### Workshops (interactive sessions with questions throughout)

- Thermal stress in cows and calves, and how to monitor whether your heat-abatement strategy is working
- Pair-housing of calves – why ‘two heads are better than one’