



FROM PASSION TO PROFESSION

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Youth Learn the Profession of Dairy Goats at SDGA Workshop During ADGA National Show

by Dr. Sarah Al-Mazroa Smith

One objective of the Sustainable Dairy Goat Agrisystems team is to educate and inspire the next generation of dairy goat producers. In support of this mission, the team hosted a 4-hour interactive youth workshop at the 2026 National Dairy Goat Show in West Springfield, Massachusetts.

The workshop was led by Graci Bedwell (Iowa 4-H), Dr. Paul Plummer (University of Tennessee– Knoxville), and Dr. Sarah Al-Mazroa Smith (Iowa State University). A total of ten youth participants— from 9th grade through age 21 —attended the session, representing various regions across the United States. This year's workshop centered on hands-on learning in business and marketing. The sessions



Dr. Paul Plummer instructs a group of participants at the SDGA Youth Workshop during the ADGA National Show.

focused on business terminology, budgets and financial analysis along with different production topics that impact dairy goat businesses. The sessions concluded with a discussion with Chris Owens of Spinning Spider Creamery, who shared insights into her business and discussed various items as youth are thinking through the business side of the dairy goat industry. This workshop provided an engaging, in-depth learning experience for youth passionate about dairy goat production.

"We were excited to be able to attend and facilitate another youth workshop at the ADGA National Show! This group of youth were excited to learn more about how to take their passion of dairy goats and see different business opportunities that may be available," said Dr. Al-Mazroa Smith.

"It was great to see youth engaged throughout the 4 hours and very interested in this topic," added Graci Bedwell.

"We are excited about the opportunity to continue these youth workshops at future ADGA National shows. This is a great experience for the youth to learn about current topics that researchers are working on to support the dairy goat industry," said Dr. Plummer.

Thank you to those who participated. The SDGA team looks forward to hosting another youth workshop at next year's ADGA National Show.

➤ Reports from the Field

Stakeholder Engagement at ADGA National Show

by Dr. Emmanuel Kanchewa

The American Dairy Goat Association (ADGA) National Show is a premier event for dairy goat producers, breeders, youth exhibitors, and industry stakeholders in the United States. The 2026 ADGA National Show was held in

Springfield, Massachusetts, from June 28 to July 2, featuring breed competitions, youth activities, educational events, and networking opportunities that brought together members of the dairy goat community from across the country. The rotating national event serves as an important gathering for knowledge exchange, relationship building, and the celebration of excellence in dairy goat production.

As part of the Sustainable Dairy Goat Agrisystems project's stakeholder engagement efforts, project representatives attended the National Show to connect with dairy goat producers and learn more about their experiences, challenges, and priorities. The event provided a valuable opportunity to engage producers across a range of operation sizes, production systems, and geographic regions. During the event, producers were introduced to the project, its goals, and progress to date. Conversations allowed for discussions of the project's activities and direct learning from producers about their experiences in the dairy goat industry.

Interest in the project was strong, with as many as 30 producers providing their contact information and expressing a willingness to participate in future discussions. These new connections will support ongoing efforts to ensure that producer perspectives inform project

activities and outcomes. The interactions also helped expand the network of stakeholders who can contribute valuable insights to future phases of the project. A recurring theme across many of the conversations was the challenge of navigating regulations for dairy goat production, particularly for producers interested in developing or expanding commercial dairy enterprises. Producers frequently cited regulatory requirements as a major consideration when entering or growing within the industry. The prominence of this topic across multiple discussions underscored the importance of understanding how regulatory environments influence producer decision-making and business development.

Beyond individual conversations, the National Show highlighted the strength of the dairy goat community. Producers exchanged knowledge, shared experiences, and discussed common challenges and opportunities facing the industry. These interactions underscore the importance of social and human capital in agricultural communities, where relationships and information sharing fuel innovation, resilience, and long-term success.

Overall, the ADGA National Show served as a valuable venue for building relationships with producers, expanding stakeholder networks, and gaining insights into issues affecting the dairy

goat industry. The connections established during the event will help guide future engagement activities and ensure that producer experiences remain central to the project's work.

» Reports from the Field

Dairy Goat Facilities and Profitability

by Dr. Larry Tranel

Dairy goats continue to be an important and growing part of Iowa's dairy sector, with around 30% of Iowa dairy farmers milking dairy goats. In certain areas, like Washington County, dairy goats are especially significant for Amish communities, as well as other producers in the region. USDA designations indicate that dairy goats from this area represent some of the highest genetic value in the United States. Financial studies conducted locally also point to strong profit opportunities for new and beginning producers. As a result, dairy farmers from across the country travel to this region to purchase seedstock and learn from Extension and experienced producers.

In response to growing demand for on-farm learning opportunities, Dr. Larry Tranel, Dairy Field Specialist with Iowa State University Extension and Outreach and Sustainable Dairy Goat Agrisystems, partnered with local producers to host a

tour and educational program for 21 beginning dairy farmers who are considering building dairy goat facilities. Many participants came from Indiana Amish communities, though the program was designed to provide value for both visiting and host farmers. Six farms in Johnson and Washington counties were selected to highlight a range of facility designs and management approaches. Dr. Tranel served as facilitator and shared results from regional dairy goat financial analysis studies, along with practical experience related to facilities and profitability.

Survey results from the participating producers showed strong learning outcomes, with most attendees reporting increased understanding of profitability, labor efficiency, facility design, and key management practices. Several indicated plans to make changes to their operations or enter the dairy goat industry as a result of the program, and many identified ISU Extension and Outreach and Dr. Larry Tranel as trusted advisors moving forward.

The impact of dairy goat production extends beyond individual farms to the broader economy. Each dairy goat in Iowa is estimated to contribute \$3,000 to \$4,000 to the local economy, based on comparisons to the dairy cow industry. While some milk is processed within Iowa, a significant portion is transported to Wisconsin for processing.

Many of the producers who attended the tour are looking to purchase animals from the Kalona area, further reinforcing southeast Iowa's role as a hub for high-quality dairy goat genetics and industry growth.

» SDGA Webinar Report

Systems Thinking for Dairy Goat Sustainability: Bridging the Decision-Support Gap in US Livestock Research

by Uttama Deb, Fatemeh Taghvaei, Amir Shadjou, Farzam Hosseinpour / PI: Dr. Marty Matlock / University of Arkansas

Despite comprising more than one billion animals globally and constituting the fastest-growing commercial livestock sector in the United States, dairy goats remain critically understudied in sustainability science. There is also a broader need across the field for sustainability frameworks that move beyond environmental measurement toward tools that producers can actively use to inform farm-level decisions.

Addressing both of these gaps is central to the mission of the SDGA project. On May 20, 2026, our research team presented findings at a webinar convened by Iowa State University Extension and Outreach and SDGA,

making the case for a US-specific, holistic assessment of dairy goat production systems especially the one that extends beyond a single metric but encompasses environmental performance, financial feasibility and the practical decision-support tools that producers need to evaluate, track, and improve the resiliency in their operations. We discussed what it means for sustainability research to assess what matters to the producers who make decisions on farms.

The life cycle assessment adheres to ISO 14040 and 14044, adopting 1 kg of fat- and protein-corrected milk (FPCM) at the farm gate as the functional unit within a cradle-to-farm-gate system boundary that encompasses feed crop cultivation, enteric fermentation, manure management, and on-farm energy consumption. To establish a US-specific life cycle inventory (LCI), the team developed a structured, self-administered producer survey capturing farm-level inputs across herd structure, feeding regimens, milk production, and resource use. The data obtained from this instrument constitute an important empirical baseline for life cycle inventory development in US dairy goat production systems.

Our socio-economic analysis addresses the need to include subclinical disease pressure, the labor cost of the family-owned farm, feed efficiency in milk

production, and the market conditions necessary for producers to act on environmental research results. For instance, feed costs are the most significant single input, but they are subject to highly variable market prices, which makes deterministic models difficult to use. The return from technology adoption scales with herd size, giving a disproportionate benefit to large farms. The choice of market channel and premium for environmental products are both variable and depend on the size of the farm in ways that impact whether an environmentally sustainable practice is a profitable decision. Sustainability is not a farm-level concept but a socio-economic one, dependent on market structure, institutional structure, supply-chain structure, access to credit, and policy structures.

The dynamic farm systems model, integrates three coupled subsystems: animal and herd dynamics (lactation curves, kidding cycles, replacement and culling protocols, and mortality); feed and nutrition (ration composition, dry matter intake, and nutrient utilization calibrated against published benchmarks); and farm economics (milk revenue, kid and cull sales, feed and labor costs, and capital depreciation). This architecture enables scenario analysis i.e., the capacity to predict the consequences of specific management

decision across profit, herd structure, feed efficiency, and GHG intensity simultaneously, and constitutes the primary mechanism by which the model transcends prediction to deliver actionable decision support.

To support our efforts and participate in our survey, please email us at sdga@uark.edu or call 515-918-1766.



Upcoming Events & Engagement Opportunities

University of Wisconsin & Iowa
State Extension & Outreach

Parasite Patrol: Winneshiek County

Iowa State University Extension and Outreach and University of Wisconsin - Madison Extension are launching the 2026–2027 Parasite Patrol Tour, a multi-state workshop series designed to help sheep and goat producers improve parasite management and combat dewormer resistance. The tour kicks off August 4 in Decorah, Iowa, and includes additional workshop locations throughout Iowa and Wisconsin. Participants will receive hands-on training in parasite biology, targeted treatment strategies, and fecal egg counting to support healthier, more productive flocks and herds. Read about the August 4 kickoff event and view the full schedule of upcoming workshops online.

SDGA

Dairy Goat Artificial Insemination Course (Virtual / In-Person)

Dairy goat producers, veterinarians, extension professionals, and industry stakeholders are invited to strengthen their reproductive management skills through a new Dairy Goat Artificial Insemination (AI) Training Program. Starting in late August, this course consists of five weeks of online instruction (free of charge, open to all) and a one-day, hands-on training workshop on October 3 (fee applies; each hands-on training session is limited to 20 participants).

Participants must complete the online instruction to be eligible for the hands-on workshop. The workshop will be offered at two regional locations: Cuba City, Wisconsin, and the University of California, Davis.

Contact Jennifer Bentley at 563-382-294

SDGA

Take Our Survey: Dairy Goat Life Cycle Assessment (LCA)

We invite you to take part in a national research project focused on making dairy goat farming more sustainable, profitable, & resilient. With dairy goats becoming more popular for their adaptability & efficiency, it's time to better understand how our farms impact the environment — & how we can improve.

Contact the SDGA team at 515-918-1766

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