

Balancing profits, people, and planet

Suzanna Dalrymple prefers to focus on the big picture as she takes on challenges in the Canadian dairy industry — BY JACK KAZMIERSKI —

Suzanna Dalrymple was appointed CEO of Gay Lea Foods just over a year ago, in February 2023. Although she is new to Gay Lea Foods, her experience in the food industry goes back more than 25 years, and includes almost two decades with Procter & Gamble, as well as a handful of years with Mars.

"I was drawn to Gay Lea Foods for many reasons," she says, "one of which is the fact that it's a co-operative, and that's something that really appealed to me, having worked in big multinationals for over two decades."

Dalrymple's previous experience with a private company, as well as a large public company, helped her see the difference a co-operative like Gay Lea Foods can make.

"Gay Lea measures success not only by the value that we create, but also the value that we give back," she says. "We're really committed to finding the right balance between delivering performance, developing our people, and doing right by our community. That was really appealing as I was thinking about my next move."

Gay Lea Foods' rich history was also appealing to Dalrymple.

"I feel really privileged to be working for a business that was started in 1958 by a group of dairy farmers, who for generations, through hard work and

determination have built Gay Lea into a sizeable and meaningful business that's really committed to furthering the dairy industry."

Dalrymple is well aware of the bigger picture that defines what Gay Lea Foods values as an organization.

"It's a great opportunity and a great responsibility," she explains. "I don't know if I feel more or less pressure working for a group of dairy farmers, but it's all about how we stay true to our values, and how we make smart decisions that will ultimately lead to a better tomorrow, so that we can have a home for our members' milk and build a sustainable and growing dairy industry."

Walking the talk

According to Dalrymple, as a co-operative, Gay Lea Foods is focused on more than just the next quarter. "It's really rooted in the values of balancing profits, the people, and the planet," she says. "I think a lot of companies nowadays talk that way, but Gay Lea has been committed [to this philosophy] for generations, and Gay Lea really does make a difference, does think about long-term sustainable growth and the impact on communities, in almost equal measure."

Like any other segment of the economy, the dairy industry is facing several challenges, including trade issues and the need for innovation. These issues, how-



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ever, don't intimidate Dalrymple. Rather, she feels energized, excited and is eager to tackle them head-on.

"I'm in year one of our five-year strategic plan," she says. "I've got a lot of heavy lifting to deliver the next five years, and I'm doing it with a great team. So that's my focus. It's still early days, and I'm excited about what we've been able to accomplish in a short period of time. It's been great working with both the board of directors, as well as the management team and all the employees. I'm excited about seeing all this through." ●