



Legacy & Leadership

Andy Dederich is the third generation of his family to work in the cheese and dairy industry. His grandfather made cheese and sold equipment to the industry, and his mother and father started a cultures and enzymes business in the late 1970s into the mid '80s.

Dederich started his career working for his parents in sales and marketing roles, and continued even after the sale of the Dederich Corp. to Sanofi in 1985. Throughout his career, he held many roles in sales and marketing, working with global sales, key account management and product management. He made significant contributions to the industry and worked for a number of ingredient suppliers including Dairyland Food Laboratories, Sanofi, SKW, Degussa, Cargill and DSM. He retired from Chr. Hansen in 2021.

Throughout his career, he has actively participated in many leading dairy organizations in the United States including The Wisconsin Cheese Makers Association (WCMA), the International Dairy Foods Association and the U.S. committee to the International Dairy Federation. WCMA awarded Dederich with its highest honor, the Life Member Award, in 2022.

Family is important to Dederich. He has been married to his wonderful wife, Jenny, for more than 40 years. He has three grown children and seven grandchildren. In addition to work and family, he has been actively involved with his church for many years, including council, committees, choir and other projects there.

Q Please comment on the significance of “giving back” via contest auction participation, scholarships or event sponsorship?

A Over my career in the cheese and dairy industry, it has always been critical to support the industry with active participation in these types of activities. Most of the key suppliers to the industry feel they are an integral part of the industry and that their active participation has benefited the industry and promoted more success. Participation in these functions helps keep the industry alive. It supports the art and craft of cheesemaking, helps the next generation achieve their educational goals and encourages us all to continue what we are doing and reflect on how we can do more to serve the industry better.

Q As a leader in cheese ingredients, how has Chr. Hansen managed to stay ahead of emerging trends among consumers?

A Staying ahead of emerging trends is certainly a top priority at the moment. Chr. Hansen has done a couple of things that are critical to remaining current and relevant with our customers. First is the relationship with their customers. As they are selling B2B, their customers’ insight and feedback is extremely helpful in maintaining understanding and positioning. The second is that they remain close to the market through newsletters, seminars and industry meetings. There are many contacts that a global company develops over time, and by listening, a lot can be learned to help identify needs and provide the right solutions.

Q What is one ingredient for cheese over your career that you feel was a disruptor or game changer for the industry?

A As I reflect on the changes over the last 40+ years, it is clearly starter culture. When I began, there were a number of plants still carrying their own mother culture. This practice worked fine based on the amount of cheese that was being made at those plants. The developments in culture media in the late 1970s-1990s really were important for the growth and expansion of the size of cheese plants.

What really has been the disruptor, though, is the continuing development of DVS, or concentrated cultures. At the beginning, the effectiveness of the cultures was limited, and it was difficult to justify using them for more than phage rotation or starter failure. Today, major factories are using them to make all of their cheese. The economics for using DVS today makes it a better alternative to bulk starter and has several advantages. Recent developments in flavor profiles for these product lines make them acceptable for everyday use in standard and specialty varieties of cheese.

Q How has your experience on various industry boards benefited you and the companies you’ve worked for?

A It has always been a privilege to be able to work on industry boards. That experience is eye opening in that you really get to learn what is important to the industry in total and how these associations are working to support the industry.

There were several times when there were major regulatory and ecological changes and issues happening both locally and globally for markets. How the industry groups were managing those was

important. It was also important to actively participate as our perspective as a supplier — seeing things from a different perspective brings value. I was able to serve with at least three different organizations in this fashion and really enjoyed that experience.

Q What is an example of an ingredient trend that you were at the forefront of in the industry?

A Chymosin. The continuing development of this critical enzyme and the understanding of how best to utilize it in cheesemaking continues to impress me. My involvement in this area has preceded the development of fermentation produced chymosin (FPC), and I have seen how the improvements have really changed yields for the better. The expertise in the area of maximizing the amount of cheese from a vat is truly amazing, and I believe that the incremental increases in yield and quality of the curd from the vat greatly benefited the industry financially.

Q With customization more prevalent than ever before, how do ingredient suppliers work more closely on collaboration these days?

A Customers have specific directions that they want to move their business in. As a supplier, it is really important to be able to listen to what those desires are. The key is that sometimes you are not given a clear signal as to what the customer is trying to accomplish. Asking a lot of questions and talking with people throughout an organization to understand their perspectives can help to find the right solutions.

Q What valuable business insight do you feel is necessary to pass on?

A People and trust. You need to say when you do not know something. You can find out, but tell the truth. People want and need to trust people. Years ago, there were many saying that someday we would not have a need for sales or meeting together. Computers would do everything.

At the end of the day, people buy from people. You need to work collaboratively. And it is not just with your customer, but also your company. Many times, you will need to help your organization see the things that your customers and markets are demanding.

Q How have you developed creative thinking within yourself and encouraged it in others?

A Team development. You never work as an island — you work with a number of people throughout your organization. Make them feel like they are part of the team and have them really help to solve problems. Getting everyone involved encourages more enthusiasm to problem solving. Really developing the team gives more people the power to contribute to find solutions.

Q What, in your opinion, does the dairy industry need to do to attract the next generation of leaders?

A We need to tell our story. We have an excellent story to be proud of. Just last year, I heard speakers talking about the near-term sustainability in dairy, getting dairy to be carbon neutral. Dairy uses technology that is really state of the art, and we are not done yet.

People need to eat! Cheese is a great product, and it is easy to get behind it with the direction our industry is moving. Students need to start hearing about this in high school as a great career path! Before students set off for college, they should hear about the art and craft of cheesemaking as a career option.

The need for technologists to help our companies — whether they are in food, computer or engineering — really is critical, and most do not understand this importance.

Q Have you fostered certain habits throughout your career that have encouraged/promoted your company’s success?

A There are several things that I have done that have helped the companies that I have worked for. They include working hard, managing up and sharing news. Working hard is self-explanatory. The work is never done, and there is always more you can do. That being said, work on some balance in life. Managing up includes knowing who your boss and others in leadership are within your company and what they want or expect from you. Make certain that they understand what is going on with you and your job. Sharing news is not just about the good stuff. Your bosses need to know the bad stuff, as well. CMN