

A Look Into Agricultural Careers
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The agricultural industry in New York is vast. There are many career choices that can be found here, from the farmer to all those involved in the rest of the industry. Our committee is working to show just how varied agriculture can be and encouraging our youth to take a look, or maybe a second look, at what agriculture can do for them.

Here is the first of three interviews with people involved with the agricultural industry. Jim Kelleher works for DFA, the largest dairy cooperative in the state. He answered questions about his career and role in agriculture. Read on to find out more.

I've served in the dairy industry for more than 41 years, 18 of which were at Dairylea/DFA. Currently, I am Senior VP of membership overseeing all operational areas of membership.

In my role today, my main responsibility is to be responsive to and supportive of our dairy farmer members. Through the years, I've always felt that a good personal relationship with members is the best approach to bringing value and making an impact.

Getting to know farms, understanding their business and getting a feel for their needs builds trust and helps me better serve them. So, I take an active role in engaging with members on all sorts of issues. Also, I have a great team of people I work with that can bring value to farms whether through our milk quality specialists or folks on our staff that can bring technical expertise to a regulatory issue.

We very much function as a team and work to match up a farm's need with the staff member that has that area of expertise. I also work to advocate for farms – so, wherever I am, I am speaking on behalf of our members' and working to get their perspective understood. Given the lack of connection many lawmakers, regulators and consumers have with production agriculture, this is an area where those of us in the industry can have a positive impact on farms by telling their story.

Although we are in a low price cycle and look to be for a while due to the increased milk production and slowing milk demand, I see a bright future for the Northeast dairy industry. First, our farms grow the vast majority of their feed so their operating costs put them at a competitive advantage to some of their peers in other areas of the US.

We also have an abundant supply of water, which is very important to growing a quality feed supply. We have stable infrastructure in place to support farms whether its plant capacity, equipment dealers or veterinarians and we have a good network of roadways to move milk to plants quickly.

The Northeast is also lucky to be closest to some of largest population centers in the country. This leads to a higher utilization of Class 1, which in many cases increases our overall blend price. From a DFA perspective, we've taken a strategic approach to invest in dairy processing plants so that more of our member milk is going into plants that we own.

In the Northeast, this approach of purchasing idled plants has provided usable capacity for us to place excess milk rather than having plants close. Additionally, our investments are attracting major dairy processors to the Northeast, which will eventually help increase capacity overall.