



GLOBAL DAIRY OUTLOOK CONFERENCE 26

Meet our Speakers



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ALYSSA BADGER

Vice President, Global Operations & Insights, **HighGround Dairy**

Alyssa started her career at the Board of Trade managing a firm that had a primary focus in grains. The nucleus of her position centered around order entry and research development. From there, Alyssa's enthusiasm for commodities grew which led her to move to West Texas and assist in hedging for the largest originator of U.S. cotton to textile mills worldwide. Alyssa has been back in Chicago for more than ten years with HighGround as the Director of Global Operations, overseeing the market intelligence and advisory business units. Alyssa's risk management background, as well as working closely with New Zealand and other international dairy companies, provides HighGround a unique value-add perspective.



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BETTY BERNING

Contributing Dairy Economist, **HighGround Dairy**

Betty Berning is HighGround's Contributing Dairy Economist, providing commentary on the domestic dairy markets. Betty has extensive experience in the agricultural supply chain and has held a wide variety of roles including Senior Dairy Buyer at General Mills, Loan Officer at Farm Credit, Extension Educator at the University of Minnesota, and has worked on her family's dairy farm in Central Minnesota. These experiences have enabled her to understand both the challenges farmers face as well as the decision-making processes of food companies and consumers. Her passion is writing, teaching, and presenting on dairy to interested audiences everywhere. In her free time, she repairs things that her three sons break, hones her sandwich making skills, and regularly visits her family's dairy where her sons' energy is put to good use. Occasionally she catches an episode of the Golden Girls on her couch with a glass of pinot noir.



MICHAEL BURDENY

Chief Commercial Officer, **California Dairies Inc.**

Michael Burden joined Challenge Dairy Products Inc., a wholly owned subsidiary of California Dairies Inc. (CDI), as President in 2020. Following Challenge's integration as a division of CDI in 2024, he now serves as CDI's Chief Commercial Officer.

As a member of CDI's executive leadership team, Michael leads the commercial organizations responsible for the company's value-added branded and private-label retail and foodservice businesses. His scope includes Challenge, Danish Creamery, In Good Hands, and CDI's new state-of-the-art ESL/UHT fluid milk facility, Valley Natural Beverages, which began production in January 2025. He plays a key role in driving the company's commercial growth, overseeing both sales and marketing across these platforms.

Previously, Michael served as Global Head of Marketing for Blue Diamond Growers, where he led the consumer products division, including Snack Almonds, Almond Breeze, and Nut Thins. He has also held senior global leadership roles in marketing, innovation, and strategic planning at industry-leading companies such as Samsonite, L'Oréal, Symantec, and Procter & Gamble.

Michael earned a Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Manitoba and an MBA from McGill University. He currently serves on the boards of the American Butter Institute (ABI) and the California Milk Producers Board (CMPB) and is based in Dublin, California.



STU DAVISON

Senior Manager, **Global Market Insights, HighGround Dairy**

Stu is a true Kiwi dairy farmer from a long line of farmers in New Zealand's Waikato region, known for its significance to the country's dairy industry. Raised in a farming family, he developed a strong business acumen and an understanding of the global dairy market. After studying at Lincoln University, Stu spent eight years working on dairy farms, gaining firsthand experience in the industry.

Before joining HighGround Dairy, he led the NZX Dairy Insights team for three years, building a reputation for his expertise in data analysis and market trends. His deep knowledge of New Zealand agriculture and the global dairy market makes him a key voice in shaping insights for major dairy exporting and importing regions.



ALEX GAMBONINI

Senior Manager, **Advisory Services, HighGround Dairy**

Originally hailing from Petaluma, California, Alex was raised on her family's dairy farm, fostering her love for the industry from a young age. She pursued her education at Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo, where she earned her bachelor's degree in Dairy Science and Agricultural Business. Later, she furthered her studies at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, obtaining a master's degree in Applied Economics. During her time in Minnesota, Alex conducted research focused on dairy farm profitability, showcasing her dedication to understanding the economic aspects of the industry.

Following her academic pursuits, Alex gained valuable experience working for the USDA within the California Federal Milk Marketing Order for three years. This experience provided her with unique insights into the intricacies of milk pricing and pooling, enhancing her understanding of dairy market dynamics.

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ERIC MEYER

President & Founder, **HighGround Dairy**

Eric Meyer is a seasoned dairy risk management and sourcing professional with more than 23 years of experience including tenure at Downes-O'Neill LLC, Sara Lee Corporation, FCStone & Winona Foods before founding HighGround Dairy in 2012.

Eric's extensive hedging and procurement experience for both small boutique firms and large multi-national corporations gives him a unique insight into the dairy market. He has a strong reputation of creating insightful educational programs and content, specifically HighGround's comprehensive dairy market intelligence, industry-leading analysis that is read by subscribers across the globe.

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CARA MURPHY

Senior Manager, Dairy Market Intelligence, **HighGround Dairy**

Cara Murphy is originally from the Heartland, where she grew up raising beef cattle just outside of Des Moines, Iowa. Her passion for agriculture led her to receive a Bachelor of Science degree in Animal Science from Iowa State University. Post graduation, Cara developed her expertise in international markets and economic analysis across a variety of industries, including oil and gas, construction, and agriculture. Delighted to be in dairy, Cara has been with HighGround for three years, delivering global and domestic market insights. Her diverse background and strategic mindset provide customers with a holistic viewpoint on changing market dynamics.

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EARL RATTRAY

Managing Director, **Dairy Link Ltd.**

Earl Rattray is a 40-year veteran of the New Zealand Dairy Industry. His longstanding career has taken him from sharemilking to multiple farm ownership to senior dairy industry leadership roles in New Zealand.

Earl was a founding Board member of the Fonterra Co-operative Group and the founding chairman of the New Zealand Dairy Companies Association. He served as an independent member of the Reserve Bank of New Zealand Monetary Policy Committee. In the years since, Earl has served as a non-executive board member of several New Zealand-based companies active in Agribusiness, Biotech, Animal Genetics, and Infrastructure sectors.

Earl established a private dairy consultancy, Dairy Link Ltd, in 2010, providing specialist trade and investment advice and strategic analysis for selected clients, covering Oceania and Asian dairy sectors. He has also enjoyed a long association with GIRA, a Geneva-based strategic food consultancy, and is a regular contributor to GIRA's Global Dairy Club program.

While now retired from active farming, Earl retains equity interests in multiple dairy farming operations active in NZ, USA, and Chile. He is the founding chairman and a cornerstone Investor in Binsar Farms Pvt Ltd (India), a pioneering and now well-established dairy farming and direct-to-home fresh dairy business operating in the greater Delhi area.

Earl is a Chartered Fellow of the Institute of Directors in New Zealand and a Fellow of the New Zealand Institute of Rural Professionals. He is a relentless enthusiast for dairy farming and the role of dairy in human health and nutrition.