

## **The dairy industry needs more diverse leadership**

The need for diverse leaders in the dairy industry is greater now than ever. The new age of leaders for the industry needs to be sought out or they should step up to the task of leading the industry into the future. As on-farm leadership shifts, so should the leaders in the checkoff, cooperatives and other areas where decisions are being made that have an impact on the future of the industry.

The dairy industry is beginning to recognize the rapid changes happening in the industry today. Farmer retirement is high, and farms are selling or consolidating at a swift pace. Farmers under 35, women and people of diverse demographic backgrounds are leading more farms but are not gaining a voice by holding board positions in cooperatives or other organizations.

The U.S. has worked to make advancements in the last several years in the area of diversity. Agriculture has struggled to keep up, but it is time for the dairy industry to adopt more diversity in its leadership. If not, there could be serious consequences for the industry.

There are several property rights issues with organizations like checkoff and cooperatives. One of those is the horizon principle is centered around the issue of older members not wanting to invest in long-term assets because they will outlive the members' physical life. This issue can be seen in how older farmers and board members are more reluctant to change which is why it is so important to have a mix of ages and backgrounds serving organizations.

Having a long-term vision for an organization is so important, especially when times are difficult. This allows members to make difficult decisions when they arise. The checkoff understands the importance of encouraging farmers of diverse backgrounds to serve in leadership for the industry.

Diverse farmers taking on leadership positions can bring new ideas and mindsets to an organization. These farmers will work with current leaders to bring strong ideas to organizations that will help them succeed now and into the future. Different mindsets will allow organizations to get through even the hardest of times.

Organizations can promote diversity in their leaders in various ways. It is important to first reach out to people and empower them to lead. This will give them the confidence to step up and serve. Organizations and farmers should show how accepting they are towards change and new leaders.

Board members who were brave enough to take on the role even though they did not see anyone like themselves in leadership should provide testimony to the importance of their leadership. Prospective leaders seeing that they will be welcomed and that they can make a difference will entice them to lead.

If organizations in the dairy industry follow these guidelines for improving diversity in leadership, they will be more perseverant for years to come. Diverse mindsets will allow for greater innovation and advancements in the dairy industry. Farmers who feel they could be an asset to more diverse leadership in the industry should be courageous and step up to be one of the next leaders for the industry.