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TransformDairyNet

A new project to transform the dairy sector



Figure 1. Cow with its calf. J. Felix (Thünen Institute)

June 1st, 2024 marked the launch of **TransformDairyNet**, a Horizon Europe project coordinated by University College Dublin, Ireland.

TransformDairyNet is a groundbreaking European project designed to revolutionize the dairy industry through Cow-Calf Contact (CCC) systems. This initiative unites farmers, researchers, NGOs, and industry experts to promote sustainable dairy practices that prioritize animal welfare, environmental sustainability, and economic viability.

TransformDairyNet harnesses the expertise of 26 European partners from 14 countries. Together, they will mobilize 11 National Innovation Practice Hubs and a European Knowledge and Innovation Network. This network will comprise dairy farmers, veterinarians, advisors, supply chain actors, farmer organizations, researchers, and policymakers, all collaborating to enhance and scale up CCC dairy production and beyond.

Why change is needed

The dairy sector is in a crucial period of change, moving towards more sustainable, net-zero, and high-welfare food production. Traditionally, calves are separated from their mothers shortly after birth, impacting the welfare of both mother and calf and leading to increasing ethical concerns. TransformDairyNet aims to support farmers to upscale systems where calves can remain with their mothers or foster cows for an extended period, promoting natural behaviors, animal health, and welfare.

"Cow calf separation is a significant animal welfare challenge and ethical concern for European citizens. We are delighted to be working with pioneering farmers and others to enable more dairy cows and calves to spend time together all across Europe, making sure we've got a dairy sector fit for the future." - Prof Siobhan Mullan (Project Coordinator, UCD)

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A Collaborative European Effort

TransformDairyNet is a response to the European Union's [Farm to Fork Strategy](#), reflecting society's demand for sustainable and animal-friendly food production systems. By establishing a European Knowledge and Innovation Network (EKIN), the project will share and develop CCC knowledge across borders, benefiting from the insights and experiences of innovative farmers and animal scientists. If you would like more information or to join the EKIN, please get in touch. The TransformDairyNet project will run for 36 months, until 2027.

TransformDairyNet's key objectives are:

- *Speed up CCC Adoption:* Create a European network to address farmers' needs and knowledge gaps, helping more farms leave calves with their mothers for longer.
- *Share evidence-based best practice:* Combine scientific research with practical experience to develop and share best practices, benefiting the European dairy industry.
- *Innovation through Living Labs:* Use national hubs to test new CCC practices & ideas addressing farmers' needs, challenges, and opportunities as well as sustainability tool for CCC farmers, benefiting calves, cows, and farmers to meet consumer demand.
- *Enhance Communication:* Use digital tools to spread CCC knowledge across Europe.
- *Ensure Lasting Impact:* Work with EU FarmBook to keep sharing CCC knowledge even after the project ends.

Driving Innovation Through Multi-Actor Networks

TransformDairyNet focuses on collaboration, involving farmers, veterinarians, advisors, and researchers. National Network Facilitators (NNFs) will spearhead the formation of National Innovation Practice Hubs (NIPs), where existing and new CCC farmers and industry actors can learn from each other and trial new innovative ideas and practices together.

"We want to support existing and curious dairy farmers and support actors across Europe to work together and learn from each other in the adoption of cow calf contact systems. Farmer-led innovation is key to this process which TransformDairyNet will facilitate. We are privileged to be working with and learning from pioneering practitioners who are inspiring change. We believe this can transform the dairy sector." - Dr Jessica Stokes (project co-lead, RAU)

Looking Ahead: Leading the Future of Sustainable Dairy Production

TransformDairyNet not only seeks to transform the dairy sector but also aims to provide a blueprint for upscaling other novel agricultural practices with high societal demand. By addressing the ethical, environmental, and economic dimensions of dairy production, TransformDairyNet strives to make CCC systems the standard for European dairy farming, aligning with broader goals of sustainable farming.

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About TransformDairyNet

TransformDairyNet is a €3M European initiative funded under the Horizon Europe program, dedicated to transforming dairy farming through the adoption of Cow-Calf Contact systems. The project unites stakeholders from across the dairy sector to enhance animal welfare, sustainability, and profitability in line with the EU's Farm to Fork Strategy.

Media contact

TDN Coordinator

Siobhan Mullan

siobhan.mullan@ucd.ie

TDN Communication

FVE, NMBU, REVOLVE

info@transformdairy.net.eu

TDN website link

<http://transformdairy.net.eu/>

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Associate partners



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