

## The Dairy Industry Is Determined to Pour Itself Down Our Throats

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January 2022

*In its illogical support of Big Dairy, the U.S. government is misleading the public and padding the pockets of one industry over another.*



***Separated at birth just to die:*** A newborn calf is taken away from her mother, a dairy cow, to the veal crates, where the calf will be killed for her meat. (Photo credit: Jo-Anne McArthur/Animal Equality/[We Animals Media](#))

When author and historian James Truslow Adams [introduced](#) “the American dream” into common parlance in his 1931 book *The Epic of America*, he wasn’t suggesting that fulfilling it would require the democratically elected U.S. government to dictate what Americans ought to eat and drink or which industries they ought to fund through their hard-earned tax dollars. But that is what the U.S. government has been doing for decades by subsidizing the dairy industry—an industry that [popular opinion](#) has already left behind.

The real American dream is at odds with turning taxpayer dollars into wealth for one industry over another. An example of this is the promotion of the American dairy industry by the government. It’s the reason why the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has been telling people that [dairy deserves its own food group](#) and has [promoted](#) the idea that most adults and children should “eat or drink about three cups of dairy each day,” to ensure they are getting the required nutrients to stay healthy. This is, however, contradictory to the facts provided by the National Institutes of Health. According to the [agency](#), between 30 and 50 million Americans are intolerant to lactose (the sugar found in milk), “including 95 percent of Asian Americans, 60-80 percent of African Americans and Ashkenazi Jews, 80-100 percent of Native Americans, and 50-80 percent of Hispanics,” compared to people of northern European descent who have a “[high lactose tolerance](#).”

In fact, [some studies](#) connect the consumption of dairy products with a higher risk of certain cancers, including [prostate cancer](#) in men and [endometrial cancer](#) in postmenopausal women. Further, countries that have the highest rates of milk consumption also have the “[highest rates of osteoporosis](#).” According to a study by Uppsala University in Sweden, the consumption of milk has even been associated with higher mortality in both men and women, [according to](#) a 2014 article in the Washington Post.



***Spoiled:** For decades, the U.S. government has subsidized the dairy industry—an industry that popular opinion has already left behind. (Photo credit: Jo-Anne McArthur/Animal Equality/[We Animals Media](#))*

But these facts haven’t stopped the USDA in its quest to drive the demand for dairy. According to the [Environmental Working Group](#) and USDA data, Americans have spent \$6.4 billion between 1995 and 2020 in subsidizing the dairy industry. Included in these subsidies are marketing fees that promote the consumption of milk and several “[\[d\]airy-related programs administered by \[the\] USDA,](#)” which are designed to “benefit dairy farmers and dairy product consumers.” The dairy industry, it turns out, is milking the paychecks of Americans and turning their hard-earned money into cartons of liquid white murkiness.

Even with these steep financial gains afforded to the U.S. dairy industry, Representatives Peter Welch (D-VT), Mike Simpson (R-ID), and Senators Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) and Jim Risch (R-ID)—all representing dairy-rich states—introduced a piece of legislation in April 2021 ([ironically](#) on Earth Day), known as [the Dairy Pride Act](#). The bill, if passed, requires the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to prevent plant-based product producers from using terms like milk, yogurt or cheese as part of their labeling.

This pushback comes while [consumer demand](#) for plant-based milk—squeezed from oats, soybeans, almonds and even pistachios—is skyrocketing. Fortunately for consumers who value free choice, and markets that value fair trade, this legislation has little ground to stand on beyond the competitive fear on which it was built.

In May 2021, similar legislation—[Amendment 171 in the European Union](#)—was withdrawn by the European Parliament. Like the Dairy Pride Act, it sought to ban terms traditionally used to describe dairy products, such as “buttery” and “creamy,” for plant-based products.

Also in 2021, the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California [ruled in favor](#) of Miyoko's Kitchen, a brand that specializes in dairy-free products, after the California Department of Food and Agriculture instructed the company to stop using "terms like 'butter' and 'dairy' on product marketing and labeling"—even when paired with "vegan" and "plant-based" vernacular. The court agreed with the plant-based brand, which had argued that censoring product labeling that was an accurate description within the context of "[common parlance among consumers](#)" today violated the First Amendment's freedom of expression.

Attempts from Big Dairy to defend their turf come just when an authentic version of the American dream is taking root. James Truslow Adams defined it as a "dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement." And consumers have never before had so many opportunities to choose how to enrich their lives with healthy alternatives to dairy, whether they define a "richer and fuller" life as one without [harming animals](#), contributing to the [climate crisis](#), or causing [gastrointestinal distress](#). And from the perspective of the plant-based milk companies, it's a dream that is currently worth [\\$2.5 billion](#) in the U.S. alone. From 2019 to 2020, the plant-based milk sector grew by 20 percent, accounting for 15 percent of all retail milk dollar sales—all without USDA dollars spent on their marketing. And in May 2021, the plant-based milk market reached a new milestone when oat-milk maker Oatly Group [began](#) trading on Wall Street with a valuation of close to \$10 billion and billed as an [ESG \(environmental, social and corporate governance\) stock to buy](#), thanks to its climate-curbing benefits.

Oat milk (like other plant-based milks) has a far [lighter environmental footprint](#) than milk from cows—with [70 percent](#) less greenhouse gas emissions, while using [93 percent](#) less water from seed to shelf.

Meanwhile, Debra Roberts, co-chair of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Working Group II, in a [report](#) published in August 2019, noted, "Some dietary choices require more land and water, and cause more emissions of heat-trapping gases than others. Balanced diets featuring plant-based foods... produced sustainably in low greenhouse gas emission systems, present major opportunities for adaptation to and limiting climate change." If the U.S. is to fulfill its [original](#) Paris agreement pledge, it will need "to cut greenhouse gas emissions to 25 percent below 2005 levels by the year 2025, a goal that the country is not on track to meet," according to an NPR [article](#). Backing industrial agriculture like Big Dairy furthermore runs counter to serious climate change commitments.

If the American dream is to be realized, then its citizens deserve choice—real choice, which allows them to vote with their dollars and knowingly choose what they want to eat and drink. Freedom is not something Americans are afforded when they are brought up to believe that milk is what their bodies and the country need to be strong, simply to pad the pockets of one industry over another. Freedom is having the ability to make the best choice for oneself, and the planet.

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