

Leading the conversation on DEI in the food & drink industry: celebrating the contribution of women

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Dairy farming is undoubtedly a staple of the British food industry, with grazing herds having been an enduring part of the British countryside for centuries. And for centuries, the dairy industry has had a male-dominated workforce; in fact, across the food and drink industry in general, only 33.5% of the total workforce are women.

That being said, influential females in the industry are changing the scene. We caught up with Annabel McLelland, the Technical and Sustainability Director at Long Clawson Dairy, to ask her some questions and discuss her individual experience as a leading woman in the dairy industry.

Annabel, please tell us about your role at Long Clawson and what it entails

I am the Technical and Sustainability Director at Long Clawson Dairy, a position I've held for just over 6 years. The role encompasses many responsibilities, such as overseeing food safety and legal compliance, from milk collection to product delivery worldwide; leading all technical and hygiene functions across the business.

Some of my key tasks are to manage relationships with UK and international retailers, which involves being one of only a few women on an executive team. I lead the food safety and environmental agenda with the Board, and have overseen spearheading sustainability initiatives, including our goal to reduce CO2 emissions by 30% per tonne by 2032. I act as a conduit within the business to drive Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and sustainability targets.

My work is diverse and dynamic. One day I might be on a farm at 5:30am in overalls and wellington boots, while the next I could be traveling to meet with customers. This variety is what I love about my job!

Please tell us about your journey, from beginning through to you becoming Technical and Sustainability Director

My career path has had its challenges. In my early 20s, I noticed the lack of women in influential food industry roles. After a confidence-shaking divorce, I decided to push myself out of my comfort zone. I joined a large FMCG company in a junior technical role, where the CEO was an inspiring woman. Over 14 years, I progressed to a Head of Technical role. However, as leadership changed, I found myself in a predominantly male environment again.

As a single parent, balancing a demanding job an hour away from home became difficult. Joining Long Clawson Dairy in 2018 provided better work-life balance and a supportive environment. After a 6-month induction, I joined the executive team, finally having a voice in the boardroom.

In the past six years, we've grown as a business, fostering a culture where all staff have a voice. We live by our values: Integrity, Passion, Togetherness, Innovation, and most importantly, We Care.

What have you found difficult over the years as a female in leadership, in the Food & Drink sector?

The biggest challenge has been gaining acceptance as a strong, intelligent, and empathetic professional. Historically, women were expected to manage households while working full-time, with little recognition for their efforts.

When I started my career 26 years ago, progression opportunities for women in the food industry were limited. Life events taught me resilience, always pushing myself to improve and benefit the business.

One of the toughest moments was feeling undervalued as a single mother in a senior role, despite working long hours and weekends. The support of my mother was crucial during this time. The support of my new partner over the last 9 years has also made me realise my worth and without him I certainly wouldn't be where I am today.

The persistent need to prove oneself tenfold before being accepted in male-dominated environments has been challenging. However, Long Clawson Dairy is different. We have successful women across various departments, fostering an equitable culture.

How would you advise women and young people to be empowered and to advance their careers?

To empower women and young people:

1. Businesses must evolve to attract a diverse workforce.
2. Always be authentic and true to yourself.
3. Live by core values and believe in your abilities.

What does Long Clawson Dairy do well in achieving diversity, equity and inclusion as part of their business culture?

Long Clawson Dairy fosters a strong family feel with an inclusive culture. Key aspects include:

- Employee forums and engagement meetings.
- An open-door policy.
- Transparent communication about business decisions.
- Focus on helping team members understand the 'why' behind decisions.

I certainly feel that DE&I shouldn't be a performative exercise for social media. It should be a genuine part of workplace culture. The goal is for everyone to feel comfortable being their authentic selves at work, and this is something I feel Long Clawson Dairy strives to achieve.

What steps do you feel that can leaders take to start building a truly diverse and equitable organisation?

1. Keep an open mind.
2. Ensure everyone has a voice.
3. Practice active listening.
4. Be visible as a leader.
5. Align actions with words!

Browne Jacobson's Final Word

The dairy sector has seen significant growth and development over the years, thanks to the contributions of many influential women like Annabel. These women have proven that gender is not a barrier to success in the industry, and their achievements have paved the way for more women to take up leadership positions in the sector. The importance of having women in the dairy sector cannot be overstated, as they bring unique perspectives and skills that are essential for the growth and sustainability of the industry. It is therefore crucial that

we continue to support and encourage women to take up roles in the dairy sector, and celebrate their achievements as they continue to make significant contributions to the industry.

Key contacts

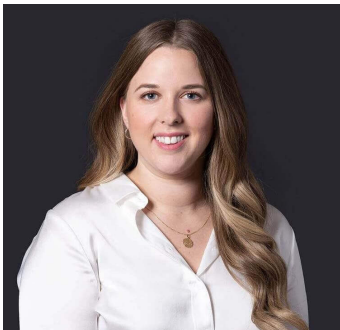


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