



Opportunities and constraints to improving milk quality in Ireland: Enabling change through collective action

C. Devitt,*¹ K. McKenzie,† S. J. More,‡ K. Heanue,§ and F. McCoy#

*Glendalough, Co. Wicklow, Ireland

†School of Psychology, Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland

‡Centre for Veterinary Epidemiology and Risk Analysis, UCD Veterinary Medicine, University College Dublin, Dublin 4, Ireland

§Rural Economy and Development Program, Teagasc Mellows Campus, Athenry, Co. Galway, Ireland

#Animal Health Ireland, Carrick-on-Shannon, Co. Leitrim, Ireland

ABSTRACT

Ireland plays a key role in contributing to the global supply of dairy produce, and increasing international demand, as well as the abolition of milk quotas in the European Union in 2015, present opportunities for the Irish milk industry. Improving milk quality is required to maximize these opportunities. National action on milk quality is spearheaded by Animal Health Ireland, yet the potential for collective action at an industry level is undermined by the inability of individual stakeholders to accept responsibility for action. In-depth qualitative interviews were conducted with $n = 12$ stakeholder representatives. The theoretical concepts of collective action (i.e., when a group of people with a shared interest undertake some kind of voluntary common action in pursuit of that shared interest) is applied to understanding the results and identifying a collective way forward. Though consensus is apparent on the need to improve milk quality, differences exist about individual responsibility and the best way to achieve higher quality standards. The propensity for collective action is undermined by shifting responsibility to other stakeholders, stakeholder positions, trust concerns, and concerns over the commitment of other stakeholders to cooperate. Understanding how collective action works provides Animal Health Ireland with a knowledge framework in which to build stakeholder consensus. The paper concludes with practical examples of how Animal Health Ireland continues to apply this understanding by bringing individual stakeholders together to achieve milk quality improvement.

Key words: collective action, cooperation, milk quality, Animal Health Ireland

INTRODUCTION

The Irish Dairy Industry

The Irish dairy industry is an important contributor to the world trade in dairy products. Although global output is relatively small (approximately 5.2 million tonnes of milk in 2009; International Dairy Federation, 2009), over 80% of dairy production in Ireland is exported to the value of approximately €2.4 billion in 2011 (Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, 2012). In 2007, the key outputs from the processing industry included butterfat (147,000 t), cheese (136,000 t), skim milk powder or buttermilk powder (88,000 t), chocolate crumb (a dry blend of milk, cocoa, and sugar; 45,000 t), whole milk powder (38,000 t), and CN (40,000 t). Since 2005, a marked increase in the production of cheese and skim milk powders, and a decrease in choc crumb and CN has been observed (Irish Business and Employers Confederation, 2007). Critically, Ireland produces 15% of the global supply of infant formula (Irish Business and Employers Confederation, 2011). Dairy production is predominantly based on a spring-calving, pasture-based system (Creighton et al., 2011). In 2010, Ireland had approximately 1.1 million dairy cows and 27,414 dairy farms, with an average of 39.9 dairy cows per farm (Central Statistics Office, 2010). The national processing industry is fragmented, with 6 main processors drawing from regionally distinct areas. It is anticipated that milk production will expand significantly—by up to 50% by 2020—given the increasing international demand for milk and milk products and the expected abolition of milk quotas in the European Union in 2015 (Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, 2010).

The Need for Collective Change

The Irish industry faces some key challenges as it seeks to maximize its potential. Udder health is a concern on several Irish dairy farms, and improve-

Received July 31, 2012.

Accepted December 19, 2012.

¹Corresponding author: catherine.devitt@ucd.ie

ments in milk quality have been identified as one way to maximize competitiveness and the marketability of Irish dairy products in a growing international market (More, 2007, 2009; More et al., 2010, 2012). Food Harvest 2020, which outlines an ambitious strategy for expansion of the Irish agri-food sector, refers to the need for all relevant agencies to encourage the adoption of best practices in animal health to improve productivity and competitiveness in international markets.

National action toward improved milk quality is being coordinated in Ireland by Animal Health Ireland (AHI), an organization established in 2009 to provide a partnership approach to the control of nonregulatory diseases by bringing together stakeholders concerned with animal health issues (More et al., 2011). A key outcome from a recent study utilizing policy Delphi methodology (More et al., 2010), was that stakeholders need to recognize, to a greater extent, their own responsibility to work together to control diseases such as mastitis, which have elements of both *public good* and *private good* (for ease of access, key terms used within this paper are italicized at first use and explained in Table 1). The study also found that challenges exist in generating consensus, shared responsibility, and *collective action*, particularly around animal health issues such as mastitis (More et al., 2010). Improvements to udder health and milk quality are of broader benefit (to Ireland as a whole and to the overall Irish dairy industry), as well as being of benefit to individuals (processors and farmers) within the industry. Collective action is a logical approach to udder health concerns in Ireland, given the lack of sustained success in past attempts, the fragmented nature of the industry (but the potential gain to all if these concerns were successfully addressed), and the potential benefits from a collective response, including the pooling of national expertise and scarce resources.

The Theoretical Concept of Collective Action

The use of the concept of collective action is common across the human sciences, where the seminal work by Ostrom and her research team is heavily cited (Ostrom, 2000). Collective action is the involvement of a group of people with a shared interest undertaking some kind of voluntary common action in pursuit of that shared interest (Meinzen-Dick et al., 2004). The literature points to several challenges to achieving collective action, 4 of which are pertinent for the purposes of this paper:

1. The propensity for collective action can be attributed to how stakeholders see their own and others responsibility and the perceived efficacy of one's contribution to the collective good (Kreps

et al., 1982; Ostrom, 2000). Fleishman (1980) argued that, though a high level of perceived responsibility can contribute to action, the recognized phenomenon of surplus resources—the more stakeholders that are involved can lead to a belief that one's contribution is not required or as significant—is also relevant. This can result in bystanders, that is, stakeholders who choose not to contribute (Schwartz and Gottlieb, 1976; Fleishman, 1980; Anker and Feeley, 2011).

2. The tendency for free-riding has been noted to take root; this is when individual benefits are gained from a public good without any contribution being made to the costs of providing that good (Hardin, 1968; Stigler, 1974; Libecap, 1989). This problem is pervasive across many situations and is illustrated by the shifting of responsibility and associated costs to other actors. This problem presents “a barrier to the evolution and persistence of collective action” (Delton et al., 2012), as the likelihood of collective action taking place and the overall expected gain for all stakeholders involved is reduced (Stigler, 1974).
3. The propensity for collective action is also threatened by the emergence of *veto players*. Veto players are those who know that a joint venture cannot continue if they withdraw their assent and cooperation. The agreement of other actors to the said joint venture work is made with the knowledge that they may only proceed if the veto player(s) is satisfied and does not withdraw their contributed action (Tsebelis, 1995, 2002).
4. Finally, *conditional cooperators* base their actions on the belief of whether and how much others should contribute (Ostrom, 2000; Potette et al., 2010), whereby an element of mind reading and attribution occurs, such that an actor(s) has a firm belief as to what another actor(s) can and should contribute.

Ways to Achieve Collective Action

Collective action can be achieved by excluding those that do not contribute collectively, by creating incentives to encourage contribution, and by reducing the expected gain for individuals so that it is lower for those who do not contribute (Ostrom et al., 1992; Raihani and Aitken, 2011; Delton et al., 2012). Facilitated communication processes and building a collective identity are important to encourage agreement among different stakeholders (Ostrom et al., 1992; Sally, 1995; Klander-mans et al., 2002). This is particularly necessary when a competitive relationship exists between stakeholders who are also orienting toward a common goal (Bengts-

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/10979128>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/10979128>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)