

Students Build Bonds With Local Farmers

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ST. LOUIS - Since 2015, St. Louis District Dairy Council (SLDDC) has brought hundreds of thousands of kids and calves together in classrooms across Missouri and Illinois. This unique pairing is possible through Adopt-A-Calf, an interactive program designed to teach students about local food, specifically milk.

The online program aims to deliver a personal experience of farm life by engaging participating classrooms from the get-go. Not only do students select a calf from one of 10 local dairy farms featured in the program's adoption barn, they name and follow her for nine months. During that time, they receive an adoption certificate, monthly pictures, and a growth chart to help them keep tabs on their new classmate.

Like most Americans, students are largely disconnected from farm life. Not only does Adopt-A-Calf bridge that gap, but it allows students to get to know farmers in a personal way. Messages, photos, and videos from farmers are delivered to classrooms every month. Students also send messages, ask questions, and complete special activities to share with their adopted calf and dairy farmer.

The monthly photos of the growing calf aren't the only way students are immersed in the world of dairy farming. Dairy Council nutrition educator Kelsey Bentlage notes "Students form a close bond with their calf and at the same time, build a special friendship with their dairy farmer. Throughout the year, they learn how farms operate, and what farmers do to care for their cows and the land around them."

This special bond helps students, farmers, and teachers learn from each other. "It's great to connect with students from different places. I'm the first farmer a lot of them have ever met," states Emily Reinhardt, one of the 6 Illinois farmers participating in the program. "The kids hear from us every month for the whole year. It's like we're part of their classroom!" states Reinhardt.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Adopt-A-Calf is a school-based initiative designed by SLDDC to promote the local dairy industry throughout Missouri and Illinois. Since 1932, the organization has communicated the benefits of dairy with educators, health professionals, and consumer groups. For more information on St. Louis District Dairy Council, visit www.stldairycouncil.org and [STLDairyCouncil on Facebook](#).