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Dairy Runway Program launches to support early-stage dairy innovators

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Cornell University's Centre for Regional Economic Advancement (CREA) and the Northeast Dairy Foods Research Centre has launched the Dairy Runway program, an entrepreneurship curriculum for dairy innovators that focuses on product concepts and consumer discovery. This Cornell-based, virtual course will take program participants through a process to determine if their value-added dairy products are desirable, viable, and feasible.

Supported by a grant from Empire State Development with funding from the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets, Dairy Promotion Order, the Dairy Runway program will provide entrepreneurial coaching and access to New York-based kitchen incubators for participants who complete the virtual course. Graduates of the program will develop the skills and training to competitively apply for local and regional funding opportunities, like CREA's Northeastern Dairy Product Innovation Competition.

"New York is well known for producing high-quality milk, a premium ingredient for many value-added products. Providing food innovators with critical entrepreneurial training will advance the state's effort to introduce more value-added dairy products and increase the utilisation and sales of milk and dairy ingredients produced in New York," said Larry Bailey, chair of the New York State Dairy Promotion Advisory Board.

Up to 12 teams will be selected into each Dairy Runway cohort to participate in a virtual course that combines self-directed online learning activities with Zoom-based class meetings and one-on-one instructor check-ins. Throughout the program, participants will have access to a select group of CREA's Entrepreneurs in Residence to provide support in coursework and product development.

"Too often entrepreneurs struggle to successfully identify their product consumer group, which can lead to product failure," said Jenn Smith, CREA's Director of Food and Ag Startup Programs. "We want to provide dairy entrepreneurs with a head start by teaching them the fundamentals of consumer discovery and delivering their product to that target group. CREA is well known for producing exceptional and easily accessible entrepreneurship curricula, and we're thrilled to extend this resource to New York's dairy community."

Engaged teams will also be offered fully-funded access to Cornell's Prototyping Kitchen or another approved incubation kitchen in New York State, and will receive support from Cornell Food Science technical experts, in order to bring their innovative ideas to the prototype stage after coursework concludes.

The application period for the Dairy Runway program closes on June 22, 2023. Dairy innovators with a value-added dairy product who are located in the United States and committed to using New York-produced dairy ingredients in their products are eligible to apply.