

**Biography**  
**Maria Kalergis, PhD, RD, CDE**  
**National Program Manager, Nutrition Scientific Affairs**  
**Dairy Farmers of Canada**

Registered Dietitian and Certified Diabetes Educator with a BSc (Dietetics) from the University of British Columbia and MSc and PhD in Human Nutrition from McGill University.

Employed at Dairy Farmers of Canada (DFC) as National Program Manager in the Nutrition Department, responsible for Scientific Affairs. Job responsibilities include managing the nutrition research funding programs, including the Nutrition and Health theme of the *Dairy Research Cluster* program, part of the Canadian Agri- Science Clusters Initiative. In this capacity, involved in the establishment of research priorities, overseeing all aspects of the research application process, monitoring the progress of the studies and communicating with the Scientific Co-ordinator. Other job responsibilities include communications/initiatives targeting health professionals and providing scientific expertise related to nutrition policy efforts.

Prior to joining DFC in 2008, she worked as a research dietitian and clinical research co-ordinator, in the field of diabetes, at the Royal Victoria Hospital in Montreal, Quebec. She was involved in several industry and government-funded projects including the NIH-funded multicentre trial *ACCORD*.

Professional interests include: evidence-based practice, research ethics and bias, knowledge transfer and translation, private-public partnerships with respect to nutrition research.

**Abstract**  
**Investments in Dairy Research: Building Partnerships for Innovation**

Since the 1980s, Dairy Farmers of Canada (DFC) has invested in research in milk production and human nutrition and health. In 1990, a formal process was created to fund nutrition and food science related research. This program was unique as it was one of the first industry-based research funding programs to utilize an independent, scientific peer-review process by which to select investigator-led projects from Canadian academic institutions. In 1996, a partnership was created with the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC) which enabled funding on a 50:50 basis.

In 2010, a unique opportunity was presented via the *Canadian Agri-Science Clusters Initiative*, a program under the Growing Forward policy framework of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC). The goal of this program was to enable key industry-led agricultural organizations to mobilize a critical mass of scientific and technical resources to support innovation strategies for enhanced profitability and competitiveness. Initial support was for 3 years with possibility of renewal, starting in 2010 until March 31, 2013 with Government: Industry funding on a 3:1 ratio basis. This program specifically addressed research priorities and projects that were established in partnership with an independent scientific committee and involved several Canadian academic institutions.

Opportunities of such partnerships include: access to a large pool of funds, capacity building among many scientists and universities across Canada and the training of a large number of highly qualified personnel (HQP). Some challenges identified include: large administrative burden and lack of co-ordination regarding knowledge transfer and translation.

Private-public partnerships such as the *Canadian Agri-Science Clusters Initiative* present a unique opportunity to drive the food for health agenda forward. The experience of Dairy Farmers of Canada with respect to private-public partnerships has been a long-standing one and one that has been very beneficial to all parties involved.