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**Real California Milk Excelserator Cohort Announced, Eight Dairy Startups Compete in 5th Annual Dairy Innovation Competition**

*CMAB and VentureFuel "Open Innovation" finalists tap into mentorship, support network to compete for funding to grow, expand products in California and beyond*

TRACY, Calif. (Aug. 17, 2023) Today, the California Milk Advisory Board (CMAB) in partnership with innovation advisory VentureFuel, announced the eight finalists selected to participate in the 5th Real California Milk Excelserator competition – the search to identify, curate, and accelerate the very best dairy-based products that introduce novel benefits and drive use of California milk and dairy in formulations.

The largest global dairy accelerator, this year's Open Innovation theme attracted dozens of applications from five countries, all with a goal of securing a spot as one of this year's participants in the three-month program that provides access to non-dilutive funding, mentors, investors and buyers, and the California Milk Advisory Board's specialized network of resources. The cohort represents themes of global flavors, functional benefits, and sustainability from upcycling byproducts of dairy production to packaging from renewable sources – all made with at least 50% real dairy.

The eight members of the 2023 Real California Milk Accelerator cohort and their products are:

Arbo's Queso Dip (Memphis, Tenn.) – Gluten-free, keto-friendly queso-style cheese dips for retail.

The Empanada Shop (Redondo Beach, Calif.) – Empanadas combining golden, flaky crust, creamy, melted cheese and a fusion of Latin American tradition and California flavors for retail and foodservice.

New Alchemy Distilling (El Dorado Hills, Calif.) – A distillery making Spilt clarified milk punch cocktails in a can made with natural ingredients, zero stabilizers and upcycled whey from cheesemaking.

Amazing Ice Creams (Stockton, Calif.) – Cookie Wild cookie wafer ice cream bar novelties enrobed in chocolate to stay crunchy.

Noorysha Yo-Gut (Los Angeles, Calif.) – Specialty probiotic dairy product designed to support gut health.

Petit Pot (Emeryville, Calif.) – French-style dairy desserts in paper-based cups made with >80% sustainable/renewable fiber.

Shakewell (Garden Grove, Calif.) – Fresh high protein drink made with five ingredients, including upcycled whey.

WonderCow Nutrition (Valencia, Calif.) – All-natural bovine colostrum powder supplement that promotes immunity, muscle recovery and gut health.

With real dairy's versatility of benefits and functionality, from nutrition and flavor to texture and chemical composition, this open approach encourages innovation across product categories, all leveraging the versatility of the California dairy ecosystem.

"The Open Innovation theme is exciting because of the variety of applications we received, and the myriad of ways startups and established brands are innovating with real milk and dairy ingredients," said John Talbot, CEO of the CMAB. "We continue to see themes of global flavors and ingredients, a focus on sustainable sourcing and packaging, and products that go deep on the functional benefits inherent in dairy to address specific consumer needs from protein to gut health. Each member of the cohort brings something new and exciting to the marketplace and we're looking forward to supporting their journey and ultimately seeing these products in the market with the Real California Milk seal."

These eight participants have access to a group stipend and a robust network of resources to refine and scale their product and business. They will also participate in the CMAB/VentureFuel Mentorship Program, consisting of elite counsel from successful founders, investors, leading corporate executives, and experts across design, marketing, sales, manufacturing, distribution, farming, and processing industries. Past mentors have included venture capitalists, successful

entrepreneurs, and executives from organizations like Unilever, UNFI and Mondelez to name a few.

"The Real California Milk Excelerator is a testament to the dairy community's commitment to forging novel connections with consumers and unexplored markets," said Fred Schonenberg, Founder and CEO of VentureFuel. "We've seen incredible displays of innovation and ingenuity from participants over the past four years, and our 2023 cohort continues to underscore the boundless possibilities within the dairy sector. VentureFuel is proud to be working with the California Milk Advisory Board for the fifth year of this program, and to continue working together to push conventional boundaries and influence transformative change in the market."

The cohort will present their companies and products at a live pitch event on November 16th where four of the eight participants will each receive \$30,000 to grow and expand their product in California and gain access to an Investor/Buyer Virtual Roadshow. One participating company will unlock an additional \$100,000 grand prize by establishing their presence in California and exhibiting the most promising growth within 12 months of the final competition. Total prize and program value is \$500,000.

The 2023 Real California Milk Excelerator celebrates the state's role as the number one producer of dairy in the United States. California, known for innovation, has a reputation for quality dairy products and leads the nation in sustainable dairy farming practices. More than 1,100 family dairy farms produce the milk found in fluid milk, cheese, butter, yogurt, ice cream, and other dairy products identified by the Real California Milk seal.

Over the past four years, the Real California Milk Excelerator has worked with more than 45 startups across numerous categories including food, beverage, direct-to-consumer platforms, textiles, and personal care. Representing nearly 40 percent of states across the U.S., program alumni have gone from idea to distribution with organizations such as UNFI and KeHE; and many can now be found on the shelves of retailers like Walmart, Safeway, Kroger, Amazon, and Whole Foods.

Details about the 2023 cohort, mentors and the final pitch event are available at [realcamilkexcelsator.com](https://realcamilkexcelsator.com).

### **About Real California Milk/California Milk Advisory Board**

The California Milk Advisory Board (CMAB), an instrumentality of the California Department of Food and Agriculture, is funded by the state's dairy farm families who lead the nation in sustainable dairy farming practices. With a vision to nourish the world with the wholesome goodness of Real California Milk, the CMAB's programs focus on increasing demand for California's sustainable dairy products in the state, across the U.S. and around the world through

advertising, public relations, research, and retail and foodservice promotional programs. For more information and to connect with the CMAB, visit [RealCaliforniaMilk.com](http://RealCaliforniaMilk.com), [Facebook](#), [YouTube](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#) and [Pinterest](#).

### **About VentureFuel**

Founded in 2014, VentureFuel is an independent innovation advisory firm that helps the world's best organizations commercialize innovation to ignite change. Its innovation programs solve clients' biggest challenges via startup collaborations. VentureFuel provides organizations like Comcast NBCUniversal, Dick's Sporting Goods and the State of California the tools to accelerate transformation with less risk, more speed, and greater proximity to the consumer than traditional innovation models. Learn more at: [www.venturefuel.net](http://www.venturefuel.net), [LinkedIn](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#). You can listen to The VentureFuel Visionaries podcast on [Apple](#), Spotify Simplecast or wherever you get your podcasts.