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**California Milk Advisory Board and Partner VentureFuel Expand Support for Dairy-based Startups with Return of Real California Milk Excelerator Competition, Addition of Incubator Track**

*Applications open through August 4, 2025 for dairy startups and entrepreneurs focused on high-growth dairy products*

TRACY, Calif., June 17, 2025 – The California Milk Advisory Board (CMAB) and innovation consultancy VentureFuel today announced the opening of applications for the seventh Real California Milk Excelerator, one of the largest dairy-specific startup competitions in the world, along with the formalization of an Incubator track for early-stage products.

The competition, which focuses on accelerating value-added products using real milk, features an immersive mentorship program and access to non-dilutive capital and an innovation ecosystem for brand growth. Since launching in 2019, the Real California Milk Excelerator has supported more than 50 startups, helping to drive multi-million-dollar growth and national retail expansion across Whole Foods, Sprouts, Costco and more. The addition of the official Incubator track, piloted in 2024, represents a deepened commitment to driving dairy innovation and supporting a broader ecosystem of entrepreneurs across all stages of growth.

“From concept to commercialization, our expanded program meets innovators where they are and helps them scale by tapping into the powerful benefits of California milk and our support system for brands that use the Real California Milk seal,” said Bob Carroll, CEO of the California Milk Advisory Board. “By formalizing the Incubator alongside the Excelerator, we’re helping even more startups realize their potential and doubling down on our long-term commitment to reimagining what’s possible with real milk from our dairy farm families.”

The Excelerator and Incubator tracks will run for 10 weeks and offer stipends to support program participation—from formulation and production to marketing and retail strategy, along with providing elite mentorship, hands-on support, and connections across the dairy supply chain. The program will culminate in an in-person event in California where Incubator and Excelerator participants will sample their products and the Excelerator cohort will compete in a live pitch competition with up to four finalists taking home \$30,000 in marketing support. Those four will then compete over the following 12 months to unlock an additional \$100,000 in support based on in-market performance.

The Real California Milk Excelerator is open to growth-stage companies already demonstrating product traction and revenue, while the Incubator track is built for early-stage startups, including pre-revenue concepts. Applicants will be evaluated through a single submission and placed into the track that best aligns with their business stage, traction, and goals.

The program’s return comes amid renewed momentum for dairy. According to Circana, real milk sales rose 4.6% year-over-year in dollar terms through May 2025, underscoring consumer interest in real milk for its taste, nutrition, and versatility.

“Dairy is experiencing a powerful resurgence as consumers seek authentic, nutritious options—and the opportunity for innovation has never been greater,” said Fred Schonenberg, Founder and CEO of VentureFuel. “In year seven of the Real California Milk Excelsator, we continue to unlock new commercial growth for visionary entrepreneurs who are building with dairy, no matter what stage their products are in. By connecting bold ideas with the resources, expertise, and network they need, we are proud to work with CMAB to help shape the future of dairy and drive the next wave of category-defining products.”

Applications are open through August 4, 2025. Startups and entrepreneurs developing high-growth dairy products made with at least 50% dairy are encouraged to apply. Categories of interest include beverages, snacks, cheeses, yogurts, butter, confections, and even non-edible items such as personal care or pet products with a specific interest in GLP-1 friendly, gut health, high protein, lactose-free and reduced sugar products.

Interested parties can apply or learn more about competition rules, key dates, the application process, and RSVP for a virtual information session on July 15, 2025 at 12 PM PST at [realcamlkexcelerator.com](https://realcamlkexcelerator.com).

The 2025 Real California Milk Excelsator celebrates the state’s role as the number one producer of dairy in the United States. California, also known for innovation, has a reputation for quality dairy products and leads the nation in sustainable dairy farming practices. More than 1,000 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.

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### **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. Connect with the CMAB at [RealCaliforniaMilk.com](https://RealCaliforniaMilk.com), [Facebook](#), [YouTube](#), [Tik Tok](#), [Instagram](#), [X](#) and [Pinterest](#).

### **About VentureFuel**

VentureFuel is an independent innovation advisory firm that helps the world's best organizations commercialize innovation to ignite change by working with startups. Its innovation programs help enterprise organizations learn, test, build and invest in emerging technology to solve their biggest problems today and unlock new sources of growth. VentureFuel provides organizations like Hershey's, Comcast, Dick's Sporting Goods, AARP Foundation and the State of California the tools to drive transformative change with less risk, more speed, and greater proximity to the consumer than traditional innovation models. Learn more at: [www.venturefuel.net](https://www.venturefuel.net), LinkedIn, X, and Instagram. You can listen to The VentureFuel Visionaries podcast on Apple, Spotify, Simplecast or wherever you get your podcasts.