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## **The California Milk Advisory Board and VentureFuel Double Down on the Future of Milk as Real Milk with the Return of the Real California Milk Excelerator Competition**

*Leading open innovation dairy competition returns for 6<sup>th</sup> year with a search for innovative products tapping into the \$5.6 trillion global Health & Wellness market<sup>1</sup>*

Tracy, Calif. – June 3, 2024 – The [California Milk Advisory Board](#) (CMAB) today announced the return of the [Real California Milk Excelerator](#) competition, in partnership with innovation advisory [VentureFuel](#), for a 6<sup>th</sup> year with an emphasis on Health & Wellness startups. 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. The 2024 program also will feature a new Future of Dairy Expo event during the final pitch to bring together past winners and other industry leaders to showcase how real dairy fits the needs of the modern consumer.

The 6<sup>th</sup> RCM Excelerator taps into the thriving Health & Wellness market, which has grown significantly since the pandemic and is projected to reach over \$8.47 trillion by 2027, according to [Statista](#). Given real dairy's natural versatility of benefits and functionality, from nutrition and flavor to texture and chemical composition, this approach encourages innovation across product categories, all leveraging the versatility of the California dairy ecosystem.

The largest global dairy accelerator, the program is on the hunt for any company building innovative products – made with at least 50 percent real milk or dairy – that leverage the benefits of dairy to promote health, wellness, and general well-being. This includes, but is not limited to, better-for-you formulations, digestive health, cognitive function, functional ingredients, hydration, portion control, self-care, and anything in between. This year's competition offers a value of up to \$500,000 in prize and program value for products that introduce novel applications in any form and drive utilization of Real California dairy.

“Innovation is the lifeblood for all industries. Our investment in the Excelerator and the California Dairy Innovation Center continues to introduce new products and innovators/founders into the pipeline and relationship with Real California Milk,” said John Talbot, CEO of the CMAB. “With an overall market value of more than \$5 trillion, the health and wellness focus make sense and allows us to hone in on startups that are leveraging the natural goodness of milk

and its myriad benefits. Wellness for consumers is an everyday pursuit – whether physical or mental – and real dairy delivers. This is an exciting time to create products and we look forward to connecting with founders to take them to the next level.”

Over the past 5 years, the Real California Milk Excelerator has worked with more than 50 startups across categories as diverse as 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.

Each of the eight participants selected for the 2024 cohort will 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 three-month immersive 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.

“At VentureFuel, we are dedicated to driving innovation and fostering collaboration between forward-thinking organizations and disruptive startups,” said Fred Schonenberg, Founder and CEO of VentureFuel, a leading corporate innovation advisory and the CMAB’s partner since the launch of the Excelerator. “This year’s Real California Milk Excelerator represents a unique opportunity for innovators to come together with the CMAB to unlock the power of milk’s natural health benefits in a way that redefines the future of health and wellness.

"The Excelerator continues to be a catalyst for groundbreaking advancements in dairy. By providing unparalleled resources, mentorship, and access to buyers and investors, this accelerator empowers participating startups to scale their solutions and have a meaningful impact on the future of the dairy industry."

The cohort will present their concepts at a live pitch event in November where four of the eight participants will receive \$30,000 each to grow and expand their product in California and have 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.

The 2024 Real California Milk Excelerator 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 1,100 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.

More details including competition rules, timeline and application are available at [realcamlkexcelerator.com](https://realcamlkexcelerator.com). The deadline to apply is July 2, 2024.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.statista.com/statistics/491362/health-wellness-market-value/>

### **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.