Priority 9: Evaluate and promote profitable **VALUE-ADDED PROCESSING OF MILK** (e.g. yogurt, cheese) to expand market opportunities for small dairies

**150 out of 584 respondents (26%) ranked this topic as highest priority. Of those, 95 provided justification as follows:**

* 35 respondents (or 37%) commented that evaluating and promoting value-added processing of milk is key to making small dairy farms more profitable by enabling farmers to take advantage of market positioning and branding, gain easier access to niche market opportunities, and overcome marketing barriers such as product seasonality.

*“It is a fact that small dairy cannot compete with the efficiencies and volumes of larger dairies. A small dairy needs to find its niche and opportunity elsewhere to be able to remain a viable business. On-farm processing and value-added products create that niche and allow for small-scale operations to compete in a marketplace on a more level playing field.”*

* 19 respondents (or 20%) commented that evaluating and promoting value-added processing of milk could enable small dairy farmers to regain control over a volatile market and help to prevent farmers from selling their farms or taking off-farm jobs, subsequently keeping small dairy a viable industry.

*“It is no news that dairy farmers are suffering and soon there will be no one saving them because of the age of the farmers and their inability to control their market. Helping them gain back that control could save these farmers.”*

* 17 respondents (or 18%) commented that evaluating and promoting value-added processing of milk is important given the existing consumer demand for local food and products, and given the overall better quality of local dairy.

*“People want local foods produced by people they know. We need the ability to give them that.”*

* 15 respondents (or 16%) commented that evaluating and promoting value-added processing of milk would help to support New York State’s prominent small dairy industry and improved the State’s local economies, such as by creating agritourism opportunities and creating employment opportunities.

*“New York was a great dairy state and should be again. There are still plenty of good dairy farmers and grazing land around to meet expanding market demands.”*

* 5 respondents (or 5%) commented that evaluating and promoting value-added processing of milk would promote product diversification on small dairy farms and improve the likelihood that these farms remain economically viable.

*“Value-added processing is a wonderful and important way to diversify small farms and make them profitable and can really set them apart from larger dairies.”*

* 4 respondents (or 4%) commented that evaluating and promoting value-added processing of milk would help small dairy farmers overcome the burdensome USDA processing regulations that often constrain and prohibit the sale of small dairy products.

*“I feel that we should be able to sell our cheeses and yogurt or whatever without so many regulations stopping us.”*