



# Dairy CARES Report

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## Science must continue to guide dairy policy decisions

Today, California dairy families are doing more than ever to protect the environment and promote sustainable farming practices – all while continuing to provide locally produced, healthy dairy products to consumers in and outside of California, and creating hundreds of thousands of jobs.

Dairy families have stepped up to environmental challenges, adopting practices that reduce air emissions and further protect water quality. Dairy operators continually improve the way they irrigate and fertilize crops, to protect our important water resources. They're taking steps to reduce odors, dust and other emissions from dairy barns and corrals, using improved manure management techniques. Dairy farmers are the ultimate resource conservationists, engaging in a "cycle of renewal" that ensures manure is recycled as a natural fertilizer to grow animal feed crops while "waste" products from other farms, such as almond hulls, cotton seeds and culled carrots, are used to supplement cattle feed.

None of this hard work comes without costs. That's why CARES coalition members take their mission very seriously, and continue to work closely with government agencies and researchers to develop scientifically sound management practices that are also cost-effective. Our goal is to protect the many jobs dairies have created in both our cities and rural communities, with the promise of more such jobs in the future.

CARES coalition members believe California dairies can continue to promote a healthy economy and deliver fresh, locally produced products to Californians and our neighbors, while still doing our part to protect the air and water we all share.

**Good science is the key to meeting this challenge.** There are many ideas for new technologies, practices and even regulations that may be useful and should be thoroughly considered. But as with all businesses, cost of technology and practices must be carefully investigated to ensure that time and money invested delivers a real environmental benefit. Because environmental issues are complex, we must rely on solid science and research to guide our decisions.

CARES coalition members don't just talk about science – they have supported it for many years with financial and technical assistance. Through the investments and efforts of our members and collaboration with environmental agencies and academic institutions, California has become a leader in understanding the environmental issues related to dairies, and in developing sound solutions.

A recent example is the agreement of CARES coalition members to provide dairy industry financial support to a new air emissions research project to better understand emissions from feed and application of manure to crops. The \$240,000 study, approved this month by the Central California Ozone Study Agency board of directors, will greatly improve our understanding of these issues and should be extremely useful in developing good practices for feed handling and storage.

**Solid science protects us from "silver bullet" thinking.** Too often, an idea sounds promising on paper and becomes the subject of public discussion long before there is an thorough understanding of

whether it can provide a cost-effective environmental benefit. Research can help us sort out the ideas that have real merit and can result in more sustainable farming practices. Experience teaches us that there are rarely “silver bullet” solutions in agriculture. Dairy farms are complex systems. They require a comprehensive management strategy in the real world that recognizes scientific and economic considerations. Doing a lot of little things can ultimately make a big difference.

Currently, climate change is dominating much of the public policy discussion in California. Dairies are now under new, recently adopted air and water quality regulations, which have already resulted in significant improvements in dairy environmental performance. Much attention is being paid to greenhouse gas reduction efforts and renewable energy. Biogas digesters are particularly intriguing and offer an exciting opportunity to create renewable energy while utilizing manure as a resource.

**However, we should be careful to avoid seeing biogas digesters as a “silver bullet.”** Biogas digesters may present economically viable opportunities to create renewable energy and reduce emissions of greenhouse gases. Yet there remain complex technical issues and significant economic considerations related to this technology, which remains far from a “turnkey” solution at this point in history. Digesters present significant environmental and economic challenges and continue to evolve rapidly. Digesters being constructed today look significantly different than digesters of even five years ago.

As the public policy discussions continue on California’s best opportunities to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, CARES coalition members will continue to work hard to ensure that policy considerations are based on solid science, including real-world economic and practical considerations. In the past, this approach has proved successful in identifying environmental benefits and cost-effective environmental approaches. It should continue to serve us well in the future.

*CARES is a statewide coalition supporting economic and environmental sustainability for California’s dairy industry. CARES members include the Alliance of Western Milk Producers, Bank of the West, Bar 20 Dairy Farms, California Dairies Inc., California Dairy Campaign, California Farm Bureau Federation, Dairy Farmers of America-California, Dairy Institute of California, Hilmar Cheese Co., HP Hood, Joseph Gallo Farms, Land O’ Lakes, Milk Producers Council, Saputo Cheese, Turlock Dairy & Refrigeration, Western United Dairymen, and others. For information about CARES, visit our web site at [www.dairycares.com](http://www.dairycares.com), write [dairycares@aol.com](mailto:dairycares@aol.com) or call 916-441-3318.*