

Dairy Farming Environmental Fact Sheet

Most dairy farmers live and work on their farms, so it's important to them to protect the land, water and air for their families, surrounding communities and future generations.

Dairy farmers employ a wide range of environmentally sound practices from manure management programs to water recycling systems.

Water Conservation

- Dairy farmers use water responsibly in their milking parlors and in manure management and storage. For example, wastewater is recycled to flush feed alleys and irrigate fields.
- One benefit of fertilizing the soil with cow manure is to help conserve water. When manure is used as a soil treatment, the water-holding capacity of soil is increased by 20 percent, resulting in reduced groundwater needed to grow crops.

Waste Management

- Manure is spread on crop fields according to detailed nutrient management plans. These plans take into account the types of soil on the farm, the terrain of the fields, soil moisture levels, and the amount of nutrients the next crop on that field will need.
- The federal government offers incentives to help dairy farmers protect the water supply. For example, many farmers receive technical assistance when they upgrade their irrigation systems and manure storage facilities.
- New methane digester technology on some dairies converts manure into a renewable fuel that can be used to generate electricity.

Air Quality

- Dairy farmers protect air quality by following proper manure storage practices and maintaining clean facilities.
- University researchers and industry manufacturers continually work with dairy farmers to identify new ways to control odor.

Farm Management Practices

- Pesticides are used in farming to kill pests as well as to control weeds and fungus that may grow on crops.
- Many dairy farmers reduce the use of conventional pesticides through integrated pest management (IPM) programs, which combine various techniques to keep flies and other pests at bay.
- While all farmers use certain fuels, oils, gases, paints, solvents, and degreasers to maintain everyday farm operations, they work hard to properly store and dispose of these materials.

Dairy Farm Expansion

- Protecting the environment has more to do with proper management practices than the number of cows on the farm. Dairy farms, both big and small, consistently meet state and federal standards and work to minimize any impact their farms may have on the environment.
- Many dairy farmers, like other business owners, are modernizing and improving their efficiency in order to continue to support their families and meet increasing consumer demand for dairy products.

For more information about dairy farming impact on the environment, visit www.dairyfarmingtoday.org.