

California dairy summit stresses sustainability

Central Valley Business News, Monday, Oct. 8, 2018

Dairy organizations have united to host the inaugural California Dairy Sustainability Summit on November 27-28 at the Sacramento Convention Center. The summit will showcase sustainable dairy farm practices, while highlighting cost effective ways to meet ongoing challenges.

A key focus will be developing partnerships and strategies to further improve the economic sustainability of the state's family dairy farms.

"California dairy farmers have a long history of raising the bar," says Charles Ahlem, a dairy farmer in Hilmar and a board member for three of the hosting organizations. "In good times, and even now with difficult market conditions, our farmers continue to improve by supporting research and adopting new technologies."

The California Dairy Sustainability Summit will help develop strong partnerships and solutions that are good for the environment and can help sustain our family farms."

California is the first dairy region in the world to set a goal for a 40 percent reduction of methane emissions from dairy manure. With continued funding through the Dairy Digester Research and Development Program, the state hopes to have between 100 and 120 dairy digesters operating within the next four to five years. Digesters capture methane and create clean, renewable energy. At a cost of \$8 per metric ton of CO₂ equivalent reduced (not including the matching private funding), the digester program is the third most cost-effective out of the state's 48 climate action programs, its supporters say.

The Alternative Manure Management Program has now awarded funding to a total of 58 dairy farms across the state. A variety of technologies and strategies are being funded through the program to decrease methane emissions by reducing the amount of manure solids stored in wet conditions. Ongoing research continues to verify and quantify how these technologies can reduce methane emissions, while improving overall air and water quality.

A growing number of dairy farms are working with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District to convert diesel-powered feed mixers to electric. Each conversion can save up to 20 tons of nitrogen oxides per year. Additionally, more than 100 California dairy farms have also installed solar energy systems to meet their energy needs and help the state meet its clean energy goals.

"California dairy farms adhere to the strictest environmental regulations in the nation," says Cornell Kasbergen, a dairy farmer in Tulare. "It's a tough place to dairy farm, but California is our home. We're committed to working with our state's leaders to find economically and environmentally sustainable solutions."