

Dairy Cares Newsletter, April 2019

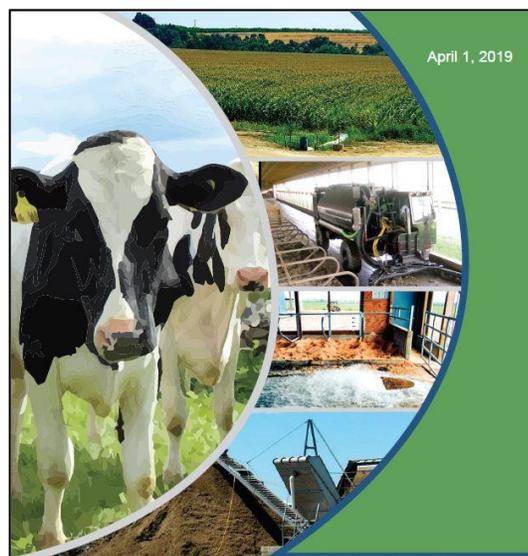
Recommendations for advancing water quality protection

On April 2, Central Valley dairies reached an important milestone in their efforts to protect groundwater. After several years of monitoring, research, and consultation with leading experts, a coalition of Central Valley dairy farmers released a comprehensive, landmark report containing recommendations to further improve groundwater quality protection. The 2019 report demonstrates dairy farmers' commitment to work with one another, regulators, scientists, and their neighbors to improve environmental protection and ensure safe drinking water supplies.

Formed in 2010, the Central Valley Dairy Representative Monitoring Program (CVDRMP)—comprising nearly all of the dairy farms in the Central Valley—has created and maintained the largest dairy groundwater monitoring effort in the world. The monitoring program was established as a way for dairy farmers to pool resources and create a strategic network of more than 430 monitoring wells on 42 dairies from the Sacramento Valley to Bakersfield. In 2012, the CVDRMP began conducting well-monitoring and soil and plant-tissue testing—regularly reporting results to the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board (Regional Board). The CVDRMP has invested more than \$20 million per year to monitor water quality, fund research, and gather expertise.

As required by the Regional Board, CVDRMP submitted its Summary Representative Monitoring Report on April 2. For much of the last two years, CVDRMP's staff and directors have been reviewing and analyzing scientific data collected over the past few years and deliberating over what recommendations to include in the report. Their goal was to provide credible, science-based and cost-effective recommendations for improving dairy farm practices in ways that will improve groundwater quality. Finding feasible, practical, and effective strategies is critically important as California's dairy farm families continue to face challenging economic times, while also working to boost other areas of environmental performance.

A summary of the report was presented to the Regional Board members and staff at their meeting on April 4, following a dairy farm tour. On the tour, Regional Board representatives were able to see firsthand how dairy farm owners and employees provide high-quality care for animals, while responsibly managing the use of natural resources, and reducing air and water quality impacts. At the Board meeting, CVDRMP Administrator J.P. Cativiela presented an overview of the summary report. He noted that scientists have found that improving management practices related to applying manure to crops is, by far, the largest area of opportunity for improving groundwater quality related to dairies. About 94 percent of nitrate losses from dairy farms are linked to fields where dairy forage crops are grown.



California dairy farmers have submitted recommendations for how they can continue to improve water quality protection efforts.

California dairies are already required to follow certified nutrient management plans to help ensure the appropriate application of nutrients on croplands. However, a key theme among CVDRMP's recommendations is to improve how these plans are developed and executed, to better ensure whole-farm nutrient balance—specifically the practice of evenly applying nutrients in ways that are optimal for crops (and avoid the leaching of nutrients into groundwater). CVDRMP's report, backed by University of California scientists, suggests one key step to achieving whole-farm balance will be to increase exports of manure from some dairies to other farms, where they can be used to build healthier soils when used in the proper amounts.

CVDRMP has worked with UC Cooperative Extension experts and others to develop the recommended improved protocols and calculators, designed to help create more accurate inventories of manure nitrogen and other nutrients. Dairy organizations are currently working to explore cost-effective options for exporting excess manure nutrients, so they can be more effectively used to help [build healthy soils](#) across the state. More ongoing research will be needed to overcome obstacles and make this vision possible.

Additionally, CVDRMP's recommendations are consistent with the Salt and Nitrate Control Plan adopted by the Regional Board in May 2018 and currently under review for adoption by the State Water Resources Control Board. That plan includes forming local management zones to protect water quality and to ensure safe drinking water is provided to all residents. In this way, dairy farmers can collaborate with other farmers and individuals to bring clean drinking water to all communities in a timely manner, as they work to develop immediate and longer-term solutions for improving water quality.

CVDRMP's report provides recommendations for near-term actions, while recognizing that numerous changes are currently underway, as California dairy farms tackle multiple environmental challenges and raise the bar for sustainable farming practices. With help from incentive programs, California dairy farms are already making significant reductions of greenhouse gas and other air emissions. CVDRMP recognizes that individual dairy farms will need to find solutions that provide multiple benefits on their operation. Meanwhile, the industry as a whole is working to most strategically provide support and develop cost-effective strategies, technologies, and models that can help all farmers improve water quality.

“Every farm is unique in many ways. However, we all face the same basic challenges,” said fourth generation dairy farmer Justin Gioletti, chairman of CVDRMP. “CVDRMP is more important now than ever, as we have come to more clearly understand the challenges ahead. We must continue working together.”

Participation in CVDRMP is voluntary, but at an all-time high, as dairy farmers pool their resources to best manage rising regulatory compliance costs. Regional Board Chairman Karl Longley commended CVDRMP for meeting the challenge of outlining the issues that must be addressed. Regional Board staff are currently reviewing the CVDRMP report and recommendations. The Regional Board is expected to adopt a new General Order for Central Valley dairy farms by February 2020. While the future regulatory changes are still unknown, it is clear that California's dairy farmers will continue to adhere to the most progressive water-protection standards in the nation.

California dairy families remain united in continually improving groundwater protection.

Dairy Cares is a statewide coalition supporting economic and environmental sustainability and responsible animal care. Our members include Bar 20 Dairy Farms, California Cattlemen's Association, California Dairies Inc., California Dairy Campaign, California Dairy Research Foundation, California Farm Bureau Federation, Dairy Farmers of America-Western Area, Dairy Institute of California, F & R Ag Services, GHD, Inc., Hilmar Cheese Co., Joseph Gallo Farms, Land O'Lakes, Merck Animal Health, Milk Producers Council, Ruan Transport Corp., Yosemite Farm Credit, Zenith Insurance Company, and others. For information, visit DairyCares.com or call 916-441-3318. To subscribe to the e-newsletter, contact news@dairycares.com.