

USDA funding highlights U.S. dairy's sustainability leadership, ambition

Several U.S. dairy companies have received USDA funding to advance ambitious industry commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, optimize water usage and improve water quality. The 2023 Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), which supports projects that promote conservation and reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, awarded more than \$1 billion through 81 projects designed to advance partner-driven solutions to conservation on agricultural land. Dairy-related companies received more than \$110 million from the overall budget.

USDA, which administers the program, also announced several improvements to this year's RCPP, including streamlining RCPP agreements for the public-private partnerships, entrusting program management and negotiation to the State Conservationists for a more locally led process, and improving RCPP guidance and training. Funding for the project was provided by the Inflation Reduction Act and the Farm Bill.

Of the dairy organizations receiving funding, five are USDEC members. They include:

Agropur

The "Agropur Dairy Producers Best Management Practices Project" (\$9.8 million) will incentivize the implementation of best management practices at farms across the central U.S. to achieve environmental benefits including delivering GHG reductions, air quality improvements, soil protection, water protection and resource conservation. In addition to RCPP funds, Agropur and Nestlé will provide financial incentives and technical assistance to farmers.

California Dairies Inc.

The "Absolute Enteric Methane Reductions in California Dairies; a New Frontier in the Journey to Net Zero" project (\$21.4 million) seeks to implement feed-based interventions, including using feed additives, to help producers reduce and avoid GHG. This approach aims to reduce the GHG footprint of the dairy industry by 35%, a step toward achieving the industry's goal of GHG neutrality by 2050.

Dairy Farmers of America

The "Climate-Smart Dairies: A Partnership for Enteric Methane Reduction using Novel Feed Additives" project (\$22.9 million) aims to support dairy farmers as they seek to reduce GHG emissions while also improving recordkeeping and expanding the dairy profit chain by implementing an integrated system that includes advanced methane avoidance

Maryland & Virginia Milk Producers Cooperative Association (MDVA)

The "Mid-Atlantic Dairy Farmers Producing Tangible Results Through Climate Smart Solutions" project (\$10 million) will work to enhance outreach and education about conservation practices—including improving water quality, reducing GHG emissions, improving soil health and increasing farm efficiency—to dairy farmers in Maryland, North Carolina, Pennsylvania and Virginia.

Tillamook County Creamery Association

The "Oregon Dairy Climate and Water Quality Partnership" project (\$4 million) seeks to enroll more than 22 producers representing a target of 10,000 cows in Clatsop and Tillamook counties and help them adopt NRCS conservation practices focused on manure management for lasting improvements to water quality of impaired watersheds.