



Dairy CARES Report

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Dairy families step up to new water quality regulations; compliance near 100 percent

There's no question California dairy families face the toughest environmental regulations in the nation. At the center of it are the Central Valley water quality regulations adopted in May 2007. These require a great deal of new record-keeping and management measures to protect surface waters and groundwater. These regulations go far beyond what was required before, and also beyond what is required in other dairy regions outside California. For example, California dairies are required to conduct environmental monitoring, develop nutrient management plans, track manure applications in each field, measure and record pond capacity and much more.

It's a formidable challenge – yet dairy families passed their first test with flying colors. Central Valley dairies were required by December 31, 2007 to file extensive reports, known as the “Existing Conditions Report” and “Preliminary Dairy Facility Assessment.” Water quality authorities now report that more than 96 percent of dairies made the deadline (and we are learning that of the few remaining dairies not yet responding, it appears many were due to going out of business or moving to a new location).

Dairy families should be congratulated – once again, they've proven their commitment to environmental sustainability with action and cooperation. What makes this compliance rate so remarkable is that – despite claims from a few misinformed critics – the California dairy “industry” is really 1,600 independent, family-owned farms. Some are large, some are small, but all are different. Outreach to that many individual businesses was a giant challenge.

CARES member organizations should be applauded for the hard work needed to reach this unprecedented level of compliance among such a large and varied group. Producer associations and creameries worked hand in hand with regulators throughout the process, through the California Dairy Quality Assurance Program and individual efforts, to assist producers with new (and unfamiliar) reporting methods, including using online reporting software.

The private consulting industry also has stepped up to work with dairy families, industry associations and CDQAP to meet the new requirements. The importance of their role can't be overstated – many dairy families will need help meeting the strict monitoring and reporting requirements now and going forward, and trustworthy, qualified consultants will be important.

There is much more to come. The next major reporting deadline is July 1, 2008, and CDQAP is already planning producer workshops beginning the week of March 10. Producers should watch for information from CDQAP, trade associations, and processors to stay up to date.

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, California Dairies Inc., California Dairy Campaign, Crystal Cream & Butter, Dairy Farmers of America-California, Dairy Institute of California, Hilmar Cheese Co., Joseph Gallo Farms, Land O' Lakes, Milk Producers Council, Saputo Cheese, Turlock Dairy & Refrigeration, Western United Dairywomen, and others. For information about CARES, visit our web site at www.dairycares.com, write dairycares@aol.com or call 916-441-3318.