



# Dairy Cares Report

November 2009

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## Dairy consumers can give thanks for advances in environmental sustainability

As the holiday season gets fully under way, dairy products will continue to be a vital part of the meals shared by millions of U.S. families. Perhaps more than any other time of year, most of us will pause to reflect and be thankful – and we should be thankful. Not only are dairy products wholesome and delicious, but they represent just a fraction of the many nutritious, affordable food options American families have come to rely on.

Yet it's becoming fashionable in some circles to add a side order of guilt to the menu. Recently, media opinion columnists and environmental activists have begun to suggest that meat and dairy products should be taken off the table – or portions substantially reduced – to reduce our impact on the environment.

Can it be that your ice cream cone, the milk in your cereal or that yogurt cup is causing global warming? Where does this notion come from?

Much of the recent debate stems from a 2006 United Nations report that attributes 18 percent of global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions to livestock farming. Even though the vast majority of human-caused GHG emissions come from other sources (primarily energy production), it is clear that livestock's role in climate change should be considered. Some are warning that as third-world nations continue to develop and their populations become wealthier, they will want to share the bounty that Americans enjoy. As those nations increase meat and dairy consumption, the impact on climate change will only worsen.

But a closer look at the facts and reality of livestock farming in the United States paints a dramatically different picture. One of the sharpest contrasts is that American ranchers and dairy farmers no longer clear forest lands to raise livestock. This is a critically important difference because according to the U.N. report, *deforestation is responsible for fully half of the greenhouse gas emissions associated with livestock ranching on a global scale.*

That's not the only important difference. For decades, American ranchers have worked hard to improve breeding and feeding of cattle, aiming to produce more meat and milk while reducing costs and improving quality. The results have been nothing short of spectacular: There are **16 million fewer dairy cattle in the U.S.** now than there were during World War II (9.3 million

today versus 25.6 million in 1944), yet today's U.S. dairy farmers produce **58 percent more milk** than they did back then.

The simple truth is: ***the carbon footprint of America's dairy industry continues to shrink*** even as it serves a growing population. And America's dairy industry has set aggressive goals to continue this efficiency, targeting an additional 25 percent reduction of global warming emissions by 2020.

Some have taken the United Nations report to suggest that we can't meet our climate change goals unless we reduce or even eliminate meat and dairy products. Not only is that pessimistic but it misses the point.

The lesson of the U.N. report is not that we must deny ourselves choice among the nutritious foods we eat. Nor is it that our neighbors in developing countries should be denied the right to eat better as their economies develop. The real lesson is that we must take steps to ensure that dairy products are produced in the most efficient and sustainable manner possible. America's dairy farmers have already shown that they can do this, and continued dedication to this goal on a global basis will allow us all to enjoy and share an abundant and sustainable food supply.

Then we will all have something to be thankful for.

*Dairy Cares is a statewide coalition supporting economic and environmental sustainability and responsible animal care and treatment within the California dairy industry. Our members include the Alliance of Western Milk Producers, Bank of the West, Bar 20 Dairy Farms, California Dairies Inc., California Dairy Campaign, California Farm Bureau Federation, Dairy Farmers of America-Western Area Council, Dairy Institute of California, Hilmar Cheese Co., HP Hood, Joseph Gallo Farms, Land O'Lakes, Milk Producers Council, Western United Dairymen, and others. For information about Dairy Cares, visit our web site at [www.dairycares.com](http://www.dairycares.com), or call 916-441-3318.*