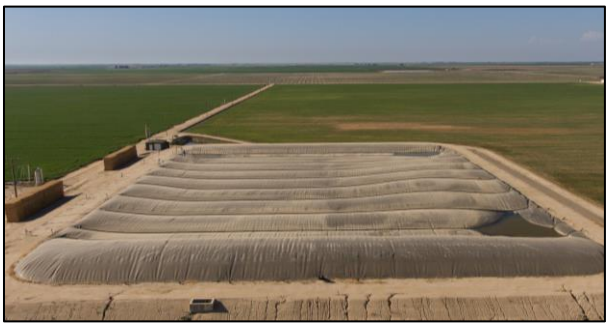
Dairy Cares News, September 2024

Voters and Data Support Continuation of Dairy Climate-Smart Efforts

Public polling and policymakers have demonstrated approval of dairy methane reduction programs that are benefiting both local communities and the planet

Those who work on California dairy farms and live nearby can tell you that methane reduction efforts are working, and that is due in large part to the existing incentive-based approach. Collectively, the state's dairy efforts are expected to achieve annual reductions of more than 6.6 million metric tons (MMTCO2e). More projects are already in the works and are expected to add significantly to the total. The dairy sector—essential to both community health and local economies—continues to make unmatched climate progress, while also improving the protection of air quality and water resources.

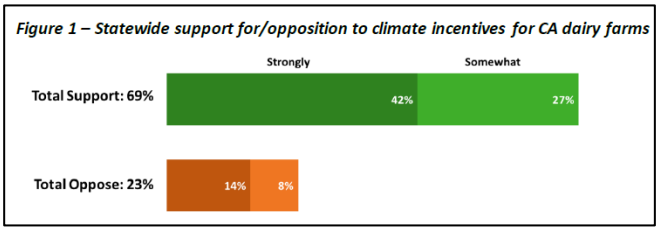


140 California digester projects have received funding support from the DDRDP. In total, the state has **238 dairy digester projects, capturing methane from 259 dairy farms**, and creating renewable energy**. About 129 of the digesters are currently in operation**, with the rest in development.

The latest analysis performed by the California Air Resource Board (CARB) staff again confirms that the current incentive-based approach for methane mitigation is working. In line with the findings, the public has demonstrated that they too see value in the incentives.

Voters support incentives and recognize food production's importance

A recent voter survey by Sextant Strategies revealed that 69 percent of all voters and 80 percent of Democrats statewide continue to support climate incentives for dairy farms.



A 2024 voter survey by Sextant Strategies revealed that climate incentives for dairy farms are supported by 69% of voters statewide with 42% of voters "strongly" in support. See full polling summary.

That same survey showed that 86 percent of statewide voters rated farming and food production as "very important" to the California economy. If these climate incentives to California dairy farms were to end, 64 percent of voters believe their food prices would increase. This is especially significant because 68 percent of voters describe the cost of food as either a crisis (30 percent) or a very serious problem (38 percent)—second only to their concern about the cost of housing. Concern about the cost of food is even higher among voters in the San Joaquin Valley, with 77 percent describing it as a crisis or very serious problem.

Food insecurity is a significant issue, which is why California dairy farmers support several initiatives to help end hunger, including pilot projects that deliver product and refrigeration resources to food banks and programs that improve food access for families. In 2023, California dairy organizations collectively donated more than 3.6 million pounds of dairy products to local food banks. Much of these efforts occur in the San Joaquin Valley, where the majority of dairy farms and product processing facilities are located.

208 alternative manure management projects have received funding support through the state's AMMP program.

Elected officials support state's climate-smart incentives

The people who represent these regions have also recognized the importance of local agricultural production and have voiced recognition of the state's successful dairy methane initiatives. All eight San Joaquin Valley counties are on record as fully supporting the existing incentive-based approach to climate-smart agriculture generally and dairy methane mitigation specifically.

To date, more than 25 legislators, including nearly all San Joaquin Valley lawmakers, from both sides of the political aisle have asked CARB to stay the course in continuing its incentive-based approach and not move to direct regulation. Key local Congressional representatives have also chimed in to support the highly successful approach. Opposition to moving to direct regulation is further evidenced by the failure of two legislative bills that sought to directly regulate the dairy sector for methane during the 2023-2024 legislative session.

Dairy climate projects also benefit local communities

Along with the successful climate progress and widespread support, California's dairy methane incentive programs are also providing significant environmental co-benefits. The incentives allow dairy farm families to design and implement projects that improve natural resources management *and* improve conditions for their employees and neighbors. The benefits include better protection of groundwater, reduction of odor, reduction of emissions that create particulate matter, and benefits to soil health.

The state's Alternative Manure Management Program (AMMP)—which has funded 208 projects to date—improves the handling and storage of manure to avoid methane production. Through a variety of technologies and strategies, projects help build healthy soils and protect water resources, while reducing the need for synthetic fertilizers. Additionally, the newer Dairy PLUS programs (co-funded by the state and the USDA through a grant secured by the California Dairy Research Foundation) support advanced manure management strategies that protect groundwater through improved nitrogen utilization, while also reducing methane.

The state's Dairy Digester Research and Development Program (DDRDP)—which has funded 140 projects to date—also provides important benefits to water and air quality. This includes the required lining of manure storage lagoons, which helps protect groundwater from potential nutrient leaching. On the air side, California's dairy digesters not only capture methane but also hydrogen-sulfide (H2S), which would otherwise oxidize in the atmosphere and create PM 2.5 (particulate matter) emissions. This provides immediate and meaningful improvements in local air quality and odor management. A recent study funded by CARB and conducted by UC Davis confirms that digesters do not harm public health or worsen air quality.

Finally, the "cow power" from California's dairy digesters also provides clean-air benefits by replacing fossil fuels. Crediting from the Low Carbon Fuel Standard (LCFS) program makes it financially viable to turn captured dairy biogas into either renewable electricity, renewable natural gas (RNG), or hydrogen fuel. California dairy farms currently power the equivalent of more than 17,000 vehicles daily. RNG from dairy farms is used in heavy duty trucks and buses, helping decrease NOx emissions from diesel fleets on local highways and greatly benefiting residents of the San Joaquin Valley.

From the methane reduced to the co-benefits, to the community support, it makes sense for California to continue investing in dairy farmers' efforts. California's dairy families are world leaders in the development of planet-smart farming practices. By staying the course, the state can achieve the full potential of this successful model and set a shining example for others to follow—cooling the planet while nourishing and enriching lives.

California's incentive-based dairy methane approach is a win-win for people and the planet.

Dairy Cares is a statewide coalition supporting economic and environmental sustainability and responsible animal care. Our members include Bar 20 Dairy Farms, Clover Sonoma, California Dairies Inc., California Dairy Campaign, California Dairy Research Foundation, California Farm Bureau Federation, Dairy Farmers of America, Dairy Institute of California, F & R Ag Services, Hilmar Cheese Company, Joseph Gallo Farms, Land O'Lakes, Inc, Milk Producers Council, Valley Milk, LLC, Yosemite Farm Credit, Zenith Insurance Company, and others. For information, visit DairyCares.com. To subscribe to the newsletter, contact news@dairycares.com.

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