Dairy industry carbon footprint study part of commitment to reduce GHG emissions

By Agri-Pulse Staff

Rosemont, IL, Sept. 24 – The U.S. dairy industry has completed a carbon footprint study measuring the greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from milk production. Researchers followed the journey of a gallon of milk from the beginning of the life cycle when crops are grown to feed cows; milk is produced and delivered to processors; through processing, packaging and distribution; all the way to the purchase and disposal of the gallon of milk by the consumer. The study is part of a dairy industry commitment to improve its environmental performance.

The Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy commissioned the Applied Sustainability Center at the University of Arkansas to conduct the GHG LCA of fluid milk, also called the carbon footprint study. The carbon footprint study, together with data from additional studies measuring GHG emissions, helps validate that total U.S. dairy GHG emissions are approximately 2 percent of total U.S. emissions. This is far less than earlier figures reported about the global livestock industry that were incorrectly attributed to U.S. dairy.

“The entire dairy industry — dairy producers, processors, manufacturers and brands — is working together to build on its long history of sustainability. We are committed to providing the nutritious dairy products consumers want in a way that makes the industry, people and the earth economically, environmentally, and socially better — now and for future generations,” said Thomas P. Gallagher, CEO of the Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy and Dairy Management Inc.™, which manages the dairy checkoff on behalf of the nation’s farmers.

The carbon footprint study identifies opportunities for efficiency and innovation across the fluid milk supply chain, including feed efficiency, manure management, energy management and fuel efficiency. A key finding indicates that management practices are an important driver of the carbon footprint for farms, plants and transportation fleets, rather than the geographic region, business model, or size of the farm or organization.

“Generation after generation, dairy farmers have made many improvements in the care of the land, air and water,” said Jerry Kozak, president and CEO of the National Milk Producers Federation. “I am pleased that hundreds of America’s dairy farmers completed detailed surveys about their farming practices, in order for us to create the most

comprehensive, accurate assessment of our industry's collective carbon footprint. Being proactive in this effort is another way to make improvements in the next generation."

Dairy businesses across the country are already making changes that are environmentally and economically beneficial. The Innovation Center has collected a variety of success stories, case studies and best practices, providing a platform for industry partners to learn from one another and make informed decisions that suit their unique needs.

One example is Prairieland Dairy, Firth, Neb., which practices a zero-waste philosophy. Byproducts from local food processors contribute to cow diets, including distiller's grain, leftover cereal mix and spent brewers grain from a nearby microbrewery. Prairieland's compost operation makes fertilizer from cow manure and local organic material, which is used on the farm and by local gardeners.

HP Hood LLC, Lynnfield, Mass., a processor, established energy management plans in its 22 processing plants, which include energy use, recycling and water use initiatives; and has decreased diesel fuel consumption through safe driver practices, electronic onboard recorders, temperature controls and automatic idle shutdown, among other practices.

To read a summary of the dairy industry study, go to:
www.usdairy.com/Sustainability/GHGReduction/Science/Pages/LifeCycleAssessment.aspx