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Moo-cow, consumer, milk producer can feel good

Farming and your Freedom

By Peter Graham

Dairy producers have fought the notion for years that moo-cows emit dangerous levels of methane gas-collectively -- through manure. Now, the industry has signed a memorandum of understanding setting a goal of cutting greenhouse gas emissions by 25 percent by 2020, not necessarily by plugging up cows.

According to Carol Stender of Agri News, the agreement was signed last month during the climate change summit in Copenhagen. Discussions started more than a year ago.

Stender said dairy producers and processors have already cut the collective industry footprint by 60 percent in the past 60 years. Discussions and goals would reduce them further. Industry leaders think anaerobic digesters are a possibility, along with energy audits and efficiency and feeding regimens.

The industry-USDA memo provides the industry with access to both USDA money and staff, Stender said. Dave Pelzer, senior vice president for strategic communications of the Innovation center for

U.S. Dairy, was quoted as saying, "Those resources will look at research and research funding" under the MOU.

The USDA has allocated $130 million over the next four years for all of agriculture to work on reduction of greenhouse gases, according to Pelzer. Dairy producers/processors are eligible for that money.

A lot of research is going into the concept of anaerobic digesters to help dairy producers to cut their greenhouse gas emissions by 25 percent by 2020, as stated in the MOU, while turning manure into electricity.

According to the U.S. Department of Energy, anaerobic digester technology is a proven method of converting waste products, such as manure, into electricity. The technology utilizes generators that are fueled by methane captured from the animal manure. Currently, only about 2 percent of U.S. dairies that are candidates for a profitable digester are using the technology, according to the DOE, even though dairy operations with anaerobic digesters routinely generate enough

electricity to power 200 homes.

Through the MOU, the USDA and the Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy will increase the number of anaerobic digesters supported by USDA programs, and encourage research and development of new technologies to help dairies reduce their greenhouse gas emissions.

Stender noted that not all dairy farmers can use digester technology, but dairy producers/processors can still look at ways of reducing costs on the dairy farm while enhancing revenues through ration development and energy audits. Still no mention of plugging cows.

Pelzer told Agri News, "This is not just about methane digesters. There are other ways producers can reduce greenhouse emissions that don't have to make farmers make an investment beyond what they are already doing."

So, relax, Mr. and Mrs. Consumer. New technologies will not push up the cost of a gallon of 1 percent past double the cost of a gallon of gasoline. And, both you and the producer (and, presumably the cow) can have clear consciences about that wonderful glass of ice-cold milk and the great benefits it gives you and your family.

I'll see ya!

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