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Eco-biz

Sustainability can have benefits for agribusinesses
Page 6



Sweet

Myths, facts about high-fructose corn syrup clarified
Page 9



Coverage

Animal welfare media coverage hurts meat demand
Pages 14-15



Alfalfa

Yellow-flowered alfalfa may enrich arid grasslands
Page 18

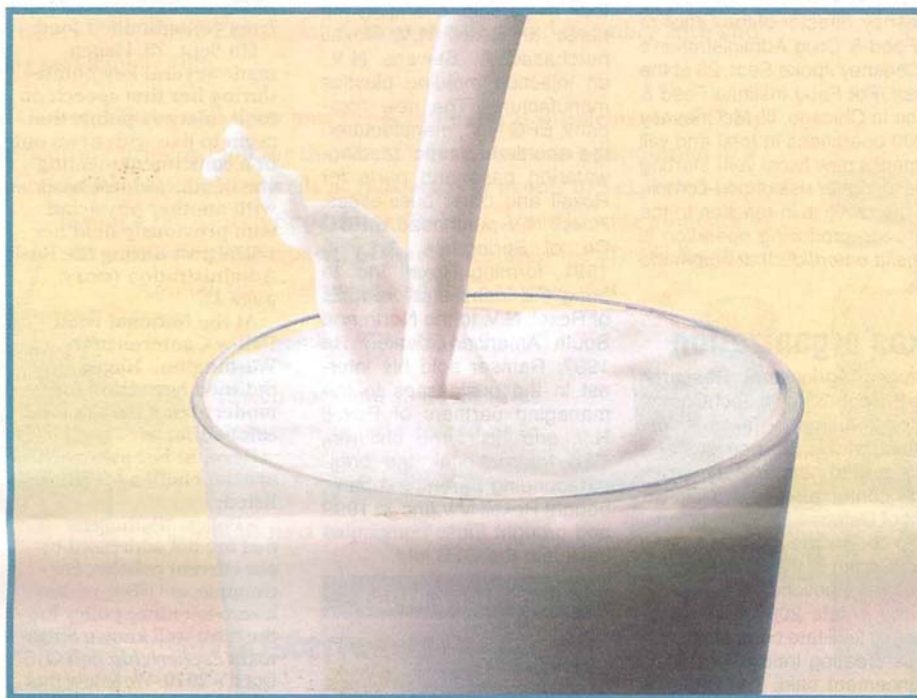
Fluid milk footprint studied

By SARAH MUIRHEAD

THE U.S. dairy industry has completed a comprehensive study of the carbon footprint associated with the production of a gallon of fluid milk, and the findings validate the results of other studies that have put the associated greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions of all dairy products at only about 2% of total U.S. emissions.

For the study, researchers followed the lifecycle of a gallon of milk — from the beginning when crops are grown to feed cows, to when milk is produced and delivered to processors, through processing, packaging and distribution and all the way to the purchase and disposal of the gallon of milk by the consumer.

The study involved 500 farms and 50 processing plants across the U.S. and more than 210,000 round trips transporting milk from farm to processor.



■ Continued page 24

Carbon footprint of

• From page 1

FROM a processing standpoint, the study represented 25% of all fluid milk in the U.S.

The Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy commissioned the University of Arkansas' Applied Sustainability Center to conduct the GHG lifecycle assessment of fluid milk, also called the carbon footprint study. Dr. Greg Thoma, professor of chemical engineering at the University of Arkansas and lead investigator of the study, presented the

findings at the International Food LCA Conference.

The study is a significant first step for the dairy industry in a comprehensive, science-based approach to measure and improve its environmental footprint, Erin Fitzgerald, vice president of sustainability for the innovation center, told *Feedstuffs*.

Fitzgerald noted that the study's key finding is that management practices are important drivers of the carbon footprint for farms, plants and transportation fleets — more so than the geographic region, business model or

size of the dairy farm or organization.

There does not appear to be a "one-size-fits-all" approach to dairy production. In fact, the study showed that there is great variability across farms and businesses and that increasing efficiency leads to a reduction in the overall carbon footprint.

For dairy producers, the ideal approach when determining areas for continued improvement is to evaluate individual operations to identify the best management practices for that particular farm, Fitzgerald said.

The greatest opportunities for im-

provement were, in fact, found to be feed conversion efficiency, manure management, increased energy efficiency, material reduction and fuel efficiency.

Specifically for the fluid milk processor, Fitzgerald said energy management was found to play the greatest role in reducing the carbon footprint of a gallon of milk; route efficiency had the greatest influence on the associated transportation component, and feed and manure management efficiency were key at the farm level.

As for consumers, frequent fluid milk users have been shown to be notably engaged in environmental issues.

Fitzgerald pointed out that a recent study by the Natural Marketing Insti-

fluid milk studied

tute showed that 62% of frequent milk users were interested in environmentally friendly milk products.

The fluid milk carbon footprint study establishes a baseline for the dairy industry — from dairy farmers to retailers — and shows continued progress in reducing the dairy industry's carbon footprint. The research also is aimed at helping identify the greatest opportunities for efficiencies and innovation.

"Sustainability has become a new way of living and a new standard for managing how we do business," said Connie Tipton, president and chief executive officer of the International Dairy Foods Assn. "The study is helping dairy businesses see that reducing GHG emissions not only meets con-

sumers' expectations for more Earth-friendly products but also reduces plant operation costs."

Findings from the fluid milk carbon footprint study will be published in a peer-reviewed scientific journal in 2011. In addition, studies on nutritional value, economic impact and other environmental measures such as water quality and conservation are under way.

In 2008, the innovation center worked with industry stakeholders to develop a roadmap of opportunities to reduce GHG emissions and build business value across the entire value

chain. Ten projects, all of which align with the opportunities for improvement identified by the carbon footprint study, are currently under way.

Research shows that over the past 60 years, the carbon footprint of dairy farms has been reduced by 63%, and according to Fitzgerald, this most recent work is helping to identify even more ways to reduce the environmental impact of dairy farms.

"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 dairy farmers.

The innovation center provides a forum for the U.S. dairy industry to work pre-competitively to address barriers to and opportunities for innovation and sales growth. ■