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Dairy industry completes fluid milk carbon footprint study

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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 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.

Involved were 500 farm and 50 processing plants across the U.S. as well as more than 210,000 round trips transporting milk from farm to processor. 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 farm or organization.