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Milk's effect on climate tallied **Cow to kitchen, emissions during process added up**

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How much does a cold glass of milk contribute to global warming?

It turns out that producing and consuming milk in the United States accounts for 2 percent of the nation's climate-changing emissions, according to a new report from the Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy.

The industry-backed group tracked milk from farm to processing plant to grocery store to consumer. The report deals with emissions of carbon dioxide and other gases believed to be building up in the atmosphere and causing a general warming of the planet.



As with past studies, this one found that plenty of the troublesome gases came from cows -- belching cows. But that's not all. Of that 2 percent contribution to global warming:

- 19 percent of milk's impact comes from growing the feed for the cows.
- 25 percent is from cows belching and passing gas; this produces methane, a potent climate changer.
- 24 percent is from manure, also containing methane.
- 4 percent is from energy use on the farm.
- 17 percent is from trucking milk from the farm, processing and packaging and distribution to retailers.
- 6 percent is at retailers.
- 5 percent is consumption, including disposal of milk containers.

The report does not consider the impact of cheese, butter or other milk-based products.

The center is using the findings as a benchmark for improvements that reduce the emissions. The options include capturing methane to produce electricity and getting more milk per unit of feed.

The findings should be of interest in the Northern San Joaquin Valley, one of the nation's leading milk-producing regions. Stanislaus County alone is home to more than 180,000 cows.

Dairy farms grossed \$462.3 million in 2009, making dairy the top agricultural commodity in Stanislaus County. Milk is also the No. 1 farm product in Merced and San Joaquin counties.

Statewide, the industry estimates it generates more than 400,000 jobs, including the ripple effect resulting in employment for truckers, grocers and other businesses. Dairy provides year-round work.

Still, the industry faces increased regulation related to climate change.

"The entire dairy industry -- dairy producers, processors, manufacturers and brands -- is working together to build on its long history of sustainability," said Thomas P. Gallagher, chief executive officer of the Illinois-based center, in a news release.

U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack said in another news release that "American agriculture can play an important role in reducing carbon emissions and improving the environment."

Vilsack also singled out the dairy industry for the work it has done to reduce emissions, saying it has been a leader on these issues.

On the Net: www.usdairy.com.