USDA United States Department of Agriculture

Newsroom

News Release

Release No. 0485.10
Contact:
Office of Communications 202-720-4623

Secretary Vilsack Commends Dairy Industry for Efforts to Reduce Carbon Footprint

Comprehensive Study Provides Scientific Baseline Measurement

WASHINGTON, Sept. 23, 2010 — Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack today commended U.S. dairy farmers and processors for their commitment to economic and environmental sustainability following the unveiling of a landmark carbon footprint study of the U.S. fluid milk sector.

"American agriculture can play an important role in reducing carbon emissions and improving the environment, and the dairy industry in particular has been a leader on these issues," Vilsack said. "This carbon footprint study will be very helpful to all stakeholders in the dairy industry and I look forward to working with dairy producers, processors and the entire value chain on efforts that benefit the environment and improve the economic viability of the industry."

The fluid milk carbon footprint study, the first of its kind for a U.S. agricultural product, was presented on September 22 at the International Food Life Cycle Assessment Conference. The study is the dairy industry's initial step in a comprehensive, science-based approach to measure and improve its carbon footprint. It will provide a scientific basis to identify research needs and enable the industry to identify and measure management practices and technologies that are most effective in increasing productivity and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Together with data from additional studies, the carbon footprint study indicates that total U.S. dairy greenhouse gas emissions are approximately 2 percent of total U.S. emissions.

The Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy commissioned the University of Arkansas' Applied Sustainability Center to conduct the fluid milk carbon footprint study. It is a life cycle assessment (LCA) that measured the greenhouse gas emissions created from the production of milk -- from when crops are grown to feed cows all the way to the disposal of the milk carton by the consumer. One of its key findings is that the increased adoption of best management practices along the entire fluid milk supply chain can increase profitability while improving environmental sustainability.

Last December, USDA and the Innovation Center for US Dairy signed an MOU to work together on sustainability issues and to reduce the industry's carbon footprint. The U.S. dairy industry has a long history of environmental stewardship. According to Cornell University, the carbon footprint of milk production dropped by 63% between 1944 - 2007 as a result of production efficiencies, nutrition management and other on-farm improvements.

More information about the U.S. fluid milk carbon footprint study is available at www.usdairy.com/sustainability.