



Lower Your Power Bills

NOVEMBER 1, 2011

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Dairies can save 10% to 35% on their utility costs with equipment upgrades.

Save energy, money with online tool

Is the lighting in your dairy as energy-efficient as it could be? What about your compressors? Did you know that milk cooling accounts for 26% of your dairy's total energy use, followed closely by ventilation? If you've put off conducting an energy audit on your dairy, you may want to consider adding that to your to-do list this fall.

The Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy recently launched an online resource that offers numerous ways to streamline energy use. The SaveEnergy website includes energy-saving tips and, most important, where to find financial assistance for audits and equipment upgrades.

"Many dairy producers aren't aware of how easy or affordable it could be to adopt energy-efficient best practices," says Steve Graybeal, a Pennsylvania dairy producer on the Innovation Center's Sustainability Council. "We want to change that with tools like SaveEnergy."

SaveEnergy helps you decide if a farm energy audit is right for you. An audit can find significant energy savings across your dairy, with a one- to five-year payback.

For example, a 500-cow dairy with an estimated annual electricity bill of \$20,160 can potentially save from \$2,016 to \$7,056 every year through more efficient energy management. A 1,000-cow dairy that spends \$40,320 on electricity each year could save \$4,032 to \$14,112.

Areas that offer some of the best energy-efficiency opportunities are milk cooling, ventilation, milking, lighting and electric water heating.

A typical energy audit includes a phone interview and a two-hour farm visit. An on-farm energy audit will inventory your dairy's current systems and equipment, and identify the cost of energy used. It also provides a detailed recommendation about actions, upgrades and potential savings that could benefit your dairy.

"Lots of entities, such as electric co-ops and utilities, do energy audits," says Robert Madeja, a business analyst with the Innovation Center. "But this is specific to dairies."

The website also helps you locate funding for audits or equipment upgrades. Just click on the map on the opening page and then double-click on your state for a list of financial assistance and incentive programs.

"We've found that dairies can save 10% to 35% on their utility costs with equipment upgrades," says Rebecca MacLeod of USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), which recently teamed up with the Innovation Center to support the SaveEnergy tool. With help from NRCS, the Innovation Center hopes to see more than 700 energy audits conducted on the nation's dairies by 2020. The results could be far broader than dollar savings and increased efficiency.

"There's a community impact," MacLeod says. "More efficient energy use reduces the amount of greenhouse gas emissions and the load on the electrical grid. It helps the whole country by leading us toward energy independence."