

## Dairy Sustainability Awards are multipurposed

**Posted:** Thursday, October 13, 2011 11:00 AM

Program designed to enhance public perception, bolster industry

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS

Capital Press

A new program, the U.S. Dairy Sustainability Awards, serves far more than just a feel-good function, according to officials at the Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy.

The awards will bring recognition to practices that sustain the industry economically, environmentally and socially, they say. The hope is that recognition will help foster a better relationship with consumers and customers, increase demand and increase adoption of sustainable practices by dairymen and processors.

The program, highlighted at the World Dairy Expo last week, will recognize a dairy farm for outstanding sustainability, a processor for outstanding processing and manufacturing sustainability and either a producer or processor for outstanding achievement in energy.

The awards celebrate good environmental practices the industry is already doing to promote positive public perception, said David Pelzer, senior vice president, strategic communications for Dairy Management Inc., which manages dairy producer checkoff dollars.

They also help raise the consciousness of sustainable practices among consumers, customers and dairymen, said Steve Maddox, a Burrell, Calif., dairyman and vice chairman of the National Dairy Board.

The Innovation Center and the Dairy Research Institute, both established by Dairy Management Inc. through dairy checkoff dollars, announced the awards Sept. 8.

The Innovation Center allows industry representatives to work together to address barriers and opportunities to foster innovation and increase dairy sales. The research institute coordinates research in such areas as health and nutrition.

The National Dairy Board designs research, education and promotion programs, using checkoff dollars, to strengthen the dairy industry's position in domestic and foreign markets.

The dairy industry's commitment to sustainability is "set up to bring the whole industry together to accelerate innovation and grow dairy sales," he said.

More and more, socially conscious consumers are concerned with the "grass to glass" environmental impact of the dairy industry, he said.

On that front, the industry committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions another 25 percent by the year 2020 in a memorandum with USDA and is well on its way to doing that, he said.

The industry has reduced those emissions 60 percent in the last 55 years, and the awards will help bring recognition of those efforts and give credit to what dairymen have already achieved and continue to achieve, he said.

The U.S. dairy industry today contributes only 2 percent of all U.S. greenhouse gasses, and that's come from efficiencies in production and energy technology.

"If we don't tell our story, no one else will," he said.

That story includes good cow care, and attention to water and air quality and soil fertility.

The industry is building on that story to consumers and customers and getting good feedback, but the Innovation Center also wants to share the economic and environmental successes with dairymen and processors in the hope they will adopt the practices.

"It's recognizing the common-sense achievements by the industry and promotes others to adopt them," he said.

That can be particularly challenging on the farm, where margins are tight. But if dairymen are made aware that even some simple changes can improve efficiencies, environmental impact, their bottom line, and overall sustainability, it would improve adoption of these practices, he said.

Nominations are being accepted through Dec. 1 and will be announced in February. The awards are being sponsored by Elanco, U.S. Dairy Export Council and Center for Advanced Energy Studies/Idaho National Laboratory.