

Dairy Today Expo Extra

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Dairy Today's Catherine Merlo brings you the latest from the World Dairy Expo.

Save Energy, Money – and Maybe Even the Planet

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Is the lighting in your dairy as energy efficient as it could be? What about your dairy's 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 has just launched a [new SaveEnergy online resource](#) that offers all kinds of ways to help dairies streamline energy use, including 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 dairy producer from Lancaster County, Pa. He's also a member of Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy's Sustainability Council. "We want to change that with tools like SaveEnergy."

I met with representatives of Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy and USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NCRS) Wednesday at World Dairy Expo. NCRS recently teamed up with the Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy to support the SaveEnergy tool. All were excited about the opportunities the new initiative offers to dairies.

The new website offers material on how to cut costs on farm energy use. According to it, farm energy audits can find significant energy savings across your dairy with a one- to five-year payback.

For example, if you have a 500-cow dairy, with an estimated annual electricity bill of \$20,160, you can potentially save from \$2,016 to \$7,056 every year through more efficiency energy management. A 1,000-cow dairy that spends \$40,320 on electricity each year could potentially save \$4,032 to \$14,112. I'm sure you can think of ways to spend those saved dollars.

Areas on your dairy that offer some of the best energy efficiency opportunities include:

- Milk cooling
- Ventilation
- Milking
- Lighting
- Electric water heating

The site also includes a [quick guide of energy-saving ideas](#) for dairies.

SaveEnergy's site also helps you decide if an energy audit is right for you. A typical energy audit includes a phone interview and a two-hour farm visit. An on-farm energy audit inventories your dairy's current systems and equipment, and identifies the cost of energy used. It also provides a detailed recommendation about actions, upgrades and potential savings that could most benefit your dairy.

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

The part of the SaveEnergy website you might like best is the page that 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, national energy efficiency liaison with NCRS.

With help from NRCS, the Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy hopes to see more than 700 energy audits conducted on the nation's dairies by 2020. The results could be far broader than dollars 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."

And it can start with something as simple as changing a few light bulbs.

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