



Dairy Research Institute receives \$1.1M to develop Dairy Farm Stewardship Toolkit

ROSEMONT, Ill. — USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack recently announced a \$1.1 million Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG) to the Dairy Research Institute, an affiliate of the Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy.

The funding will support the development of a Dairy Farm Stewardship Toolkit, designed to help dairy producers evaluate production techniques and identify potential improvements in management practices, which could increase profitability or reduce costs on the farm.

The grant, awarded through a nationwide competitive process, is made available through USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service.

The U.S. dairy industry is developing best practices and decision-support tools for producers, processors, manufacturers, transport and retail through a voluntary, industrywide effort to measure and improve dairy sustainability. The toolkit is among the first components of the Farm Smart project, which is creating a series of on-field decision-support tools for dairy and crop production management.

Development of the toolkit, which will be national in scope, will begin with establishing a set of on-farm sustainability indicators that will be pilot-tested on

farms. A broad group of stakeholders from the dairy industry and other experts will determine which indicators best describe the quality and quantity of economic, social and environmental value provided by farms. Examples of possible indicators include: a farm's contribution to the local community through jobs and community relations; energy efficiency; food safety and quality; water quality and use; waste management; and greenhouse gas emissions.

At least 12 dairy producers in each of 10 regions across the country will participate in pilot tests. The 120 producer volunteers will represent a diverse set of farms, including small- and large-scale dairies, dairies with varying milk production methods and both conventional and organic dairies. On-farm pilot tests in the designated areas will begin in October.

When completed, the toolkit will enable producers to generate an analysis of their stewardship practices and help them communicate positive contributions their farm businesses have made to neighbors, community groups, consumers and customers.

For more information, visit www.usdairy.com/sustainability. CMN