



Washington Among Nation's "Best of Class" in Dairy Sustainability

In a March 7, 2012, ceremony in Washington, D.C., the Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy announced the winners of the inaugural U.S. Dairy Sustainability Awards – a program to recognize dairy farms, dairy food companies and collaborative partnerships including dairy organizations for efforts that advance the sustainability of America's dairy industry.

Two Washington-based dairy entities were among the six awards and one honorable mention bestowed by the Innovation Center.

***Werkhoven Dairy Inc.** of Monroe, WA, was presented with the Elanco Award for Outstanding Dairy Farm Sustainability. The U.S. Dairy Export Council Award for Outstanding Dairy Processing & Manufacturing Sustainability was presented to **Darigold Inc.**, headquartered in Seattle, WA.*

Werkhoven: Unlikely partnership fosters common goals

Dairy farmers and beef ranchers; environmentalists; and Native American tribes – three groups that don't always see eye-to-eye – have nevertheless come together in western Washington to sustain local agriculture, enhance threatened salmon runs and preserve a way of life. Ten years ago, brothers Andy and Jim Werkhoven of Werkhoven Dairy in Monroe took the initiative in developing a collaborative relationship among an unlikely assortment of interests: the dairy farmers and beef ranchers of the local Sno/Sky Ag Alliance; Northwest Chinook Recovery, an organization working to restore salmon habitats; and the 3,500-member Tulalip Tribe. The goal: find ways to keep local farming, emblematic wildlife and Tulalip culture as parts of everyday life in the region bounded by the Snoqualmie and Skykomish rivers. The solution: Qualco Energy, a nonprofit organization dedicated to resource conservation. (In Lushootseed – the language of the Coast Salish peoples – qualco means "where two rivers come together.") Qualco is in the business of recycling resources by turning waste into energy. On the former site of the Washington State Reformatory near the Werkhoven dairy, Qualco built an anaerobic digester. The digester takes in many kinds of organic matter – chiefly cattle manure from area farms and pre-consumer food wastes from nearby food processing and packaging firms. Once inside

the digester, these materials are decomposed under high heat conditions – a process that yields methane gas and Grade A compost. The gas turns a generator that produces electricity – enough to power 300 local homes each day. The compost is used as a natural fertilizer to improve the nutrient profiles of local crop fields. Since these wastes don't end up in landfills or run off into streams, fish habitats prosper and salmon are preserved to play their role in Tulalip culture.



Founded by Sam Werkhoven in 1959 with 20 cows and 40 acres, Werkhoven Dairy today milks 1,000 cows and extends over 700 acres. Employing 14 full-time workers, it produced 24.4 million pounds of milk (over 2.1 million gallons) during the last year.

“We commend Werkhoven Dairy for the leadership role they took in developing this unique and collaborative partnership with a focus on resource conservation and preserving the environment in a way that makes good business sense,” commented Erin Fitzgerald, senior vice president of sustainability for the Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy.

Darigold: A systemic approach to conservation

Northwest icon Darigold Inc. may be 94 years old, but it's definitely keeping up with the times. Through a carefully researched and comprehensively planned company-wide commitment to sustainability, the Seattle-based firm has engaged with its member-owners, employees, suppliers and customers to implement ideas that enhance sustainability across the entire dairy food production, distribution and retailing chain. The company's goal is to continuously improve its performance in the areas of environmental stewardship,

community involvement and economic prosperity for the dairy farmers who own the firm. It has targeted safety performance, energy conservation, water use and solid waste reduction as priorities for improvements. The result has been 28 performance areas in which the company has measured current practice and set goals for improvements. And those improvements have not been slow to appear. Darigold has improved water usage by more than 13% (water gallons/unit). The firm now recycles 50% of its solid waste. It has realized a reduction in fuel usage of nearly 50%, saving 216,000 gallons of diesel fuel annually. It has completed over 20 sustainability-driven product packaging redesigns, lowering costs by \$1 million and greatly reducing the use of corrugated cardboard and plastic. “Striving to become better is part of the Darigold culture,” says President and CEO Jim Wegner.

Darigold Inc. is the marketing and processing subsidiary of the Northwest Dairy Association, which is owned by approximately 550 dairy farmers throughout the Northwest. Darigold produces a full line of dairy-based products for retail, foodservice, commodity and specialty markets, and is one of the largest U.S. dairy processors. It processes the equivalent of eight billion pounds of milk each year – that’s 2.5 million gallons per day – with total annual sales of about \$2 billion.

“Through their establishment of goals, measurement implementation and leadership in reporting, Darigold has become a model for dairy sustainability efforts,” said Erin Fitzgerald, senior vice president for sustainability for the Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy.

For more information about the U.S. Dairy Sustainability Awards and the U.S. Dairy Sustainability Commitment, please click on the icon below.



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