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## Three NW operations win dairy sustainability awards

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A dairy farm and a dairy processor in Washington and a business collaboration in Idaho have won sustainability awards from the Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy.

A March 7 ceremony in Washington, D.C., recognized seven winners of the inaugural U.S. Dairy Sustainability Awards. The other winners are in Vermont, Wisconsin, Maine and Pennsylvania.

The innovation center was established in 2008 through Dairy Management Inc., the nonprofit organization that manages the producer checkoff program. The awards recognize dairy farms, businesses and partnerships for practices that deliver economic, environmental and social benefit.

\* Werkhoven Dairy in Monroe, Wash., was honored for its leadership in developing a partnership with Northwest Chinook Recovery and the Tulalip Tribes. The nonprofit owns an anaerobic digester near the dairy that uses manure and pre-consumer food waste to produce methane that fuels a generator. The electricity goes to the local grid.

Erin Fitzgerald, senior vice president of sustainability for the Innovation Center, said the award recognizes the dairy's "focus on resource conservation and preserving the environment in a way that makes good business sense."

Dairy co-owner Andy Werkhoven said, "Our vision is to help start a national movement to turn animal manure and other food byproducts into a fuel source."

\* Darigold Inc., based in Seattle, received the U.S. Dairy Export Council Award for Outstanding Dairy Processing and Manufacturing Sustainability. Darigold is the marketing and processing subsidiary of the Northwest Dairy Association, which is owned by approximately 550 dairy farmers.

The company has reduced water use by more than 13 percent, recycles 50 percent of its waste and it has reduced fuel use nearly 50 percent, equal to more than 216,000 gallons of diesel fuel annually.

It has also redesigned packaging, reducing costs by over \$1 million and reducing corrugated and plastic use.

Jim Wegner, president and CEO of the company, said, "This dedication is not a new idea, but one that is deeply ingrained within us."

\* Dean Foods Co. and AgPower Partners teamed up with Big Sky Dairy West in Gooding, Idaho, to win the Award for Outstanding Achievement in Energy.

They built the first third-party-owned and -operated dairy digester in the nation, creating new revenue streams for digester products to benefit the dairy producer and investors, while preserving air and water quality.

By bringing in experts to secure financing, operate the digester and sell the energy to utility companies, the project eliminated the risk for the dairy producer and freed up time for the farm managers to care for the animals and produce milk.

Organizers said that from the first year in operation, the project has been financially self-sustaining and has paid a return to its investors, while lowering operational costs for the dairy, improving manure management and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

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