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Dairy Industry Recognizes Best-of-Class in Sustainable Businesses

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Winners of the inaugural U.S. Dairy Sustainability Awards program included (from left to right) Mike Brubaker of Brubaker Farms, Kenn Buelow of Holsum Dairies, Bill Bennett of Oakhurst Dairy, Andy Werkhoven of Werkhoven Dairy, Inc., Marie Audet of Blue Spruce Farm, Bob Joblin of DF-AP, LLC, and Steve Rowe of Darigold, Inc.

The Innovation Center for [U.S. Dairy](#) recently announced the winners of the inaugural [U.S. Dairy Sustainability Awards](#), a program to recognize dairy farms, dairy companies and collaborative partnerships for efforts that advance the sustainability of the dairy industry.

“Across the supply chain, the dairy industry continues to demonstrate leadership in meeting consumer demand for great-tasting, wholesome and nutritious dairy products, while finding new ways to preserve our planet’s precious resources,” says Barbara O’Brien, president of the Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy, which was founded by dairy producers.

In its first year, the program has gained widespread support from key organizations including Elanco, U.S. Dairy Export Council, the Center for Advanced Energy Studies/Idaho National Laboratory, United States Department of Agriculture, World Wildlife Fund, MilkPEP and the Dairy Research Institute.

Winners of the Elanco Award for Outstanding Dairy Farm Sustainability:

Blue Spruce Farm, operated by the Audet family in Bridport, Vermont, is admired as a pioneer in operational efficiency. It was one of the first farms in the country to install a variable-speed vacuum pump control, reducing energy used during milking by nearly 60 percent. Blue Spruce also was the first dairy farm to participate in the successful Central Vermont Public Service’s Cow Power program, which allows consumers to purchase renewable energy generated on a dairy farm. By implementing new technologies in lighting, milking, milk cooling, barn construction, ventilation and water heating, the farm reduced energy use from an average of 1,000 kWh per cow per year, to an average of 500 kWh per cow per year. These savings, in turn, reduced greenhouse gas emissions by an estimated 500 pounds of CO₂e per cow per year.

For **Holsum Dairies, LLC**, of Hilbert, Wisconsin, sustainability of the community and the natural environment were significant factors when they designed the dairy and planned the operations. Holsum relies on a model of trust and mutual benefit in working with nearly 40 local crop farmers and custom harvesters to provide all of the dairy’s forage needs. Benefits to the farm, the community and the environment include higher quality feed, 11,000 acres under a single nutrient management plan, lower cost and emissions associated with manufacturing and transport of fertilizer, more efficient crop production, and more precise fertilizer application.

A decade ago, **Werkhoven Dairy, Inc.**, of Monroe, Washington, assumed a leadership role in developing a collaborative partnership between their farm and the neighboring dairy and beef producers of the Sno/Sky Ag Alliance, the Northwest Chinook Recovery (an organization working to restore salmon habitat), and the 3,500-

member Native American Tulalip Tribe. These entities formed a nonprofit organization that operates an anaerobic digester system, creating enough energy each day to produce electricity for 300 homes while keeping the air and water clean and protecting salmon streams. The system also produces enough Grade A compost for Werkhoven Dairy to naturally fertilize their fields and share with their neighbors.

Winner of the [U.S. Dairy Export Council Award for Outstanding Dairy Processing & Manufacturing Sustainability, Darigold, Inc.](#), in Seattle, Washington has empowered its employees to work together to reduce use of water, fuel and energy, as well as waste. Darigold improved water usage by more than 13 percent (water gallons per unit). It recycles 50 percent of its waste, and has seen nearly a 50 percent improvement in fuel usage per unit, equal to more than 216,000 gallons of diesel fuel annually. They have completed more than 20 sustainability-driven packaging redesigns, reducing cost by more than \$1 million and greatly reducing corrugated and plastic usage.

Honorable mention of the [U.S. Dairy Export Council Award for Outstanding Dairy Processing & Manufacturing Sustainability, Oakhurst Dairy](#) of Portland, Maine, was one of the first companies in Maine to sign on to the governor's Carbon Challenge and has developed a sustainability roadmap with long-term reduction goals across all aspects of the operation. Over a two-year period (2008-10), Oakhurst reduced its plant energy, greenhouse gas emissions, water use and transportation fuel use by roughly 10 percent each — achieving half of its overall goal. This family-owned dairy processor has truly been a leader, from the installation of a solar energy system to the use of hybrid delivery trucks and biodiesel fuel.

Winners of the Center for Advanced Energy Studies/Idaho National Laboratory Award for Outstanding Achievement in Energy:

[Brubaker Farms](#) of Mount Joy, Pennsylvania, has mastered energy efficiency by creating a successful new revenue stream through the implementation of an anaerobic digester system. The farm now produces its own electricity, and the surplus electricity — enough to power approximately 200 homes — is sold to the local utility. The Brubaker family is committed to sharing its lessons learned by hosting busloads of visitors to tour the property, which includes three solar panels totaling 10,000 square feet producing an additional 130 to 150 kWh on sunny days.

In a collaboration that formed [DF-AP, LLC](#), of Gooding, Idaho, Dean Foods Company and AgPower Partners launched the first third-party-owned and operated dairy digester project in the nation, an innovative approach revealing new possibilities for digesters on dairy farms. From the very 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. The digester produces enough energy to power approximately 900 homes and produces 34,000 cubic yards of ammonia-free fiber that is sold at retail as a landscape fertilizer.

An independent panel of judges representing the full spectrum of the dairy supply chain — as well as academia, government, media, business and nongovernmental organizations — selected this year's winners based on the program's or project's results as measured by economic, environmental and social responsibility aspects.

"In reviewing more than 40 nominations and selecting the 'best of the best,' the Sustainability Awards judges were impressed by the model programs and processes that deliver real benefit to the business, community and the environment," says Molly Jahn, who serves as special adviser for Sustainability Science at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and as the U.S. Commissioner on Sustainable Agriculture and Climate Change. "Clearly, sustainability is core to the success of these farms and organizations. They serve as leaders in their communities and industry."

The awards are part of the U.S. Dairy Sustainability Commitment, an industry-wide effort to measure and improve the economic, environmental and social sustainability of the dairy industry. Launched in 2008, the Sustainability Commitment is supported by hundreds of organizations, including universities, government agencies and nongovernmental organizations.

The Innovation Center represents the entire dairy value chain — dairy producers, processors, manufacturers, transporters, retailers and brands. "We are developing unique and traditional partnerships that work toward the common goals of protecting our environment, growing our communities and strengthening our businesses," O'Brien said. "The Sustainability Award winners are a testament to efforts underway across the country, and we commend them for their outstanding work and dedication to sustainability."

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