



For immediate release – October 3, 2024

Contact:

Linda Sadler, Farm Credit Alliance
(775) 677-7876,
sadlerassociates@sbcglobal.net

or

John Frith, Write Stuff Communications
(916) 765-6533
john@twsccommunications.com

Dairy Summit Provides Ideas on How to Meet State Climate Change Goals

Special 2025 meeting added to Farm Credit-sponsored program to help navigate new policies

Meeting California's ambitious climate and clean energy goals is no small task for policymakers, businesses and residents. But thanks to its forward-looking and collaborative approach, the dairy sector is on track to meet its own world-leading climate target.

In fact, California's dairy farmers are on a path to achieving climate neutrality by as early as 2027 and meeting the state's 2030 methane-reduction goal. Two ingredients to that success are the information shared and partnerships fostered at the California Dairy Sustainability Summit.

The Summit, held every other year, is hosted in part by Dairy Cares, a nonprofit created by the dairy industry more than 20 years ago to manage sustainability issues, said Michael Boccadoro, Dairy Cares' executive director.

"The Summit was created in 2018 to educate the audiences we interact with and promote the efforts the industry is undertaking to meet sustainability goals. We want to showcase efforts and accomplishments while encouraging the partnerships and investments needed for continued success," he said.

"When SB 1383 passed in 2016, the California dairy sector became the first jurisdiction in the world with a target of achieving a 40% methane emission reduction by 2030, a goal that requires significant public and private investments, along with ongoing research. The Summit was organized to bolster innovation and collaboration, and to help dairy farmers adopt practices that improve their long-term economic and environmental sustainability."

Farm Credit organizations serving California agriculture have provided support each year since the Summit's inception.

"Dairy is a \$20 billion a year industry in California, including more than 1,100 family farms along with dairy cooperatives, processors, and other businesses," said Kevin Ralph, California

Fresno Madera Farm Credit, ACA, PCA, FLCA

4635 W. Spruce Avenue, Fresno, CA 93722 | P.O. Box 13069, Fresno, CA 93794 | (559) 277-7000 | www.fmfarmcredit.com

President of AgWest Farm Credit. “Farm Credit is proud to help sponsor the Summit because it’s so important to help the industry meet its climate mandates while continuing to provide milk and other dairy products for the nation.”

Tiffany Lionudakis, Dairy Relationship Manager with American AgCredit, agreed.

“The Summit brings together producers and other stakeholders as they consider changes that have a direct impact on sustainability. This Summit allows for reflection on what’s worked, the challenges that remain, and the possibility of future opportunities which deliver on both producers’ desire for good stewardship and consumers’ desire for sustainability,” Lionudakis said.

Farm Credit members AgWest Farm Credit, American AgCredit, CoBank, Fresno Madera Farm Credit and Yosemite Farm Credit are proud sponsors of the Summit. The organizations are part of the nationwide Farm Credit System – the largest provider of credit to U.S. agriculture.

Dairy and livestock account for over half of the state’s methane emissions – and methane alone is responsible for about 20% of the global warming driving climate change. Considering its high potency but short-lived nature, reducing methane emissions is widely recognized as one of the most important opportunities to reduce warming.



Doctoral student Abdolhossein Edalati explains a UC Davis project to create, apply and evaluate the effectiveness of pelletized manure compost as a soil amendment at the 2024 Dairy Summit.

California regulators have embraced an incentive-based approach to reducing emissions, particularly through the development of digesters – systems designed to capture methane from manure and convert it into electricity, renewable natural gas, or hydrogen. For farms where digesters are less suitable, the state’s alternative manure management program helps promote the recycling of manure in ways that create fewer emissions. The state’s investment in dairy methane reduction incentives now exceeds \$2 billion.

Boccadoro noted that European countries in contrast have invoked heavy regulations and the world’s first livestock carbon tax in Denmark, and he fears regulators there may also force dairy farmers to reduce herd sizes.

“This has led to farmer protests around Europe, and it hasn’t led to achieving the response they are looking for. We think government should use the carrot approach, without the stick if possible. We think that’s true for ag in general. Programs work best when they’re incentive based. Telling farmers how to farm rarely works well, especially when they can’t pass on the costs,” he said.

Summit attendees learn about technical solutions being implemented and the progress being made, in addition to hearing about what's being explored as potential groundbreaking solutions. Conversations like those held at the Summit have been instrumental in promoting the continuation and expansion of local, state and national programs that incentivize the adoption of new technologies.

Boccadoro said methane is emitted from both ends of the cow. Manure is the most obvious source and is being dealt with by solid waste separators and digesters. But he said that reducing the burps caused by the cow's digestive process is the next frontier.

"That's the cause of just under half the methane in California but 80-90% of it globally. Reducing enteric methane is not just important in California but even more important worldwide," he said.



A full house attended the 2024 Dairy Summit at UC Davis.

One solution there is developing feed additives that reduce the amount of methane generated in digestion. A newly FDA-approved feed ingredient, 3-NOP is beginning to help reduce methane emissions from cows by about 30%. Several other feed ingredients, such as fatty acids, oregano, seaweed and tannins continue to be explored.

The Summit takes a broad approach to addressing sustainability challenges. Beyond methane, much focus is given to advancing the protection of water quality and conservation and to adopting cleaner technologies that boost local air quality. Boccadoro cited three main takeaways from this year's Summit.

- Progress is made by working *with* farmers toward sustainability goals. New technologies and strategies must make sense for individual operations.
- Cutting-edge technologies are continually coming to (and from) California dairies, from high-tech, automated farm equipment to the use of manure-digesting worm beds. The energy captured by methane digesters is now fueling more than 17,000 vehicles annually by creating electricity, renewable natural gas and renewable hydrogen.
- A global perspective is needed because sustainable nutrition and climate change are global issues. While California leads the way in advancing sustainable production, it must also remain economically competitive in producing affordable and nutritious milk and dairy foods.

While the Summit has traditionally been held every other year, organizers recently announced an added 2025 "Farm Focus" version on the event. Considering increasingly challenging environmental policies, the March 25, 2025, Summit will be held at the Visalia Convention

Center and will focus on equipping dairy farmers with valuable information and tools. Through general sessions, breakouts and an Expo Hall, the one-day program will highlight the importance of sustainability leadership and the technologies, strategies and incentive programs available to help navigate the changes ahead.

The traditional version of the Summit will return to the UC Davis Conference Center on March 24, 2026. Topics for the 2025 and 2026 Summits are expected to include the new Dairy PLUS program that supports the adoption of advanced manure management projects that better protect groundwater while reducing emissions. The state early this year awarded nearly \$18 million to 15 dairy farm projects to kick off the new program. Other expected topics include the continued evolution of markets for biogas and information about the early adoption of feed additives.

Boccardo is confident the industry will meet its targets and credits the willingness of government and farmers to work together to find solutions.

“Ag is looked at differently in California. It’s recognized by most as a critical item. You can’t live without it, and keeping food costs low is important, especially to low-income communities,” he said. “And of course, we’ve also shown a high success rate. Dairy farmers have demonstrated a great partnership with the state and USDA to achieve reductions.”

###

About Farm Credit:

AgWest Farm Credit, American AgCredit, CoBank, Fresno Madera Farm Credit and Yosemite Farm Credit are cooperatively owned lending institutions providing agriculture and rural communities with a dependable source of credit. For more than 100 years, the Farm Credit System has specialized in financing farmers, ranchers, farmer-owned cooperatives, rural utilities and agribusinesses. Farm Credit offers a broad range of loan products and financial services, including long-term real estate loans, operating lines of credit, equipment and facility loans, cash management and appraisal and leasing services...everything a “growing” business needs. For more information, visit www.farmcreditalliance.com

About Dairy Cares:

Founded in 2001, [Dairy Cares](http://dairycares.com) is a statewide coalition with a mission to ensure the long-term sustainability of California’s dairy farm families through strong environmental stewardship and responsible animal care. For information, visit dairycares.com.

About the California Dairy Sustainability Summit:

The California Dairy Sustainability Summit has been held biennially since 2018—recognizing milestones and promoting progress, as the dairy sector makes tremendous strides in reducing its environmental footprint and advancing sustainable and nutritious food systems. The Summit is

hosted by [Dairy Cares](#), [California Dairy Research Foundation](#), [California Milk Advisory Board](#), [California Dairy Quality Assurance Program](#), and the [Dairy Council of California](#). The next Summit will take place on March 24, 2026, at the UC Davis Conference Center. For information, visit [cadairysummit.com](#).