



Dairy Cares News, September 2022

## Keeping Cows in California is Good for People and Planet

For generations, dairy farming families have made the Golden State their home, caring for their cows, and contributing to the economy and culture, especially in rural communities. The state's dairy farms and processing facilities are leading the way in efforts to nourish people and protect our planet. California's dairy farm families continue to meet a [growing demand](#) for dairy products using increasingly planet-smart practices; however, the number of dairy farms in our state continues to steadily decline, which should be a concern for all.



The number of dairies in California has decreased by 94 percent over the past 70-plus years. The number of milk cows in California has also declined since its peak of 1.88 million cows in 2008 to just over 1.7 million cows today. Despite this drop in cow numbers over the past 14 years, California milk production has remained relatively steady—thanks to continued efficiency gains and advancements in animal care and nutrition. The most drastic and constant trend in California dairy farming has been the consolidation of smaller family farms into larger family farms.

The evolution of dairy farming in California has largely resulted in [improved environmental sustainability](#)—45 percent less carbon emissions, 88 percent less water used, and 89 percent less land used per gallon of milk produced over the past 50-plus years. Producing more milk with fewer cows is good for the environment. But, when California cows pack their bags—as farming families decide to either relocate or close down and sell cows to dairies in other states—that's not good. **As explained recently in [The Press Enterprise](#), California leads the nation in climate-smart dairy farming, and cows leaving results in a “leakage” of methane emissions.** This is just one critical reason why fewer cows and fewer family farms is a big loss for the state. Here's seven more reasons why keeping cows in California is good for people and planet:

### 1. Dairy is a huge economic contributor.

Dairy is California's most valuable agricultural commodity, and milk production helps generate an estimated \$57.7 billion in annual dairy-related economic activity. The California dairy sector provides [180,000 year-round, high-quality jobs](#). Many of the jobs are in the San Joaquin Valley and are a critical source of employment to disadvantaged communities. Moreover, development of dairy methane reduction projects is creating hundreds of local construction jobs and ongoing operations and maintenance employment. With continued technological innovation occurring on farms and in processing facilities, the dairy community supports many industries. Additionally, dairy processors are at the cutting edge of product innovation, developing new, value-added products and more sustainable packaging, and partnering with colleges and universities to promote workforce development.

### 2. California dairy farms and processors are leaders in clean energy.

California's dairy sector is at the forefront of a national dairy commitment to achieve greenhouse gas neutrality by 2050. Meeting this national dairy goal will require significant investments in energy efficiency and clean energy—both within the dairy and utility sectors. California has already made great strides in its ambitious clean energy and energy conservation goals, with about [60 percent of the state's electricity](#) coming from zero-carbon sources. The state's dairy farms and [processing plants](#) are playing an important role in this progress by upgrading equipment to conserve energy usage and by installing technologies to create clean, renewable

electricity and vehicle fuel. More than 150 California dairy farms have installed on-farm solar energy. More than 200 California dairy farms have digester projects either operating or in development.

### **3. Dairy farming has a symbiotic relationship with California's other agricultural pursuits.**

Up to 40% of feed ingredients used on California dairies are agricultural byproducts, such as almond hulls, grape pomace, and citrus pulp. By upcycling locally available leftovers that would otherwise go to waste, dairy farms are reducing the use of water, energy, and fossil fuels needed to grow feed, while reducing what's sent to landfills. In 2020, researchers at UC Davis analyzed the economic and environmental [sustainability implications of feeding agricultural byproducts](#) to California dairy cows. **They determined that this practice reduces the amount of water needed to grow feed by as much as 1.3 trillion gallons.**

### **4. The dairy community supports nutrition education and food access.**

Milk and dairy products play an important role as one of the most cost-effective sources of under-consumed nutrients—including potassium, calcium, and vitamin D. By working directly with educators, foodservice professionals, and health and wellness providers, the California dairy community—via the [Dairy Council of California](#)—supports nutrition education and food access for children and families. The dairy community also helps feed millions of Americans each day by supporting federal nutrition assistance programs.

### **5. Dairy nourishes and enriches a vibrant culture.**

[California is ranked first](#) in the U.S. in the production of milk, butter, ice cream and nonfat dry milk, and second in cheese and yogurt production. The state produces more than 250 different cheeses, including 25 varieties of Hispanic-style cheeses. California dairy products and ingredients are consumed in ways that celebrate heritage, contribute to family traditions, promote health and wellness, and enhance the enjoyment of food and beverages.

### **6. The California dairy community gives back and makes a difference.**

Dairy organizations as well as dairy farm families and employees donate time, money, and energy to give back and make a difference. This includes coordinating canned food and toy drives, providing milk and snacks to first responders, and donating to local fundraisers and community projects. Dairy processing companies support health by giving to Valley Children's Hospital, Relay for Life for the American Cancer Society, American Red Cross, and other important causes. They also provide scholarship and internship opportunities to promote education and are even working to help expand [broadband access for local, rural communities](#).

### **7. California dairy farmers are among the most efficient producers of milk in the world.**

Attaining California's current level of production efficiency in all dairy regions worldwide would reduce total global greenhouse gas emissions [by as much as 1.73 percent](#). For perspective, reducing all of California's greenhouse gas emissions to zero would only reduce total global emissions by less than 1 percent.

## **Committed to People and Planet**

For all these reasons and more, California's remaining dairy farm families are demonstrating every day that they are committed to continuing their long tradition of providing sustainable nutrition to millions of people, while improving their efforts to protect the planet and strengthen our state's economy.

**There is more to gain and a lot to lose. Keeping dairy cows in California helps secure our continued enjoyment of the most sustainable milk and dairy foods.**

*Dairy Cares is a statewide coalition supporting economic and environmental sustainability and responsible animal care. Our members include Bar 20 Dairy Farms, California Dairies Inc., California Dairy Campaign, California Dairy Research Foundation, California Farm Bureau Federation, Dairy Farmers of America-Western Area, Dairy Institute of California, F & R Ag Services, Hilmar Cheese Company, Joseph Gallo Farms, Land O'Lakes, Inc, Milk Producers Council, Ruan Transport Corp., Valley Milk, LLC, Yosemite Farm Credit, Zenith Insurance Company, and others. For information, visit [DairyCares.com](#). To subscribe to the newsletter, contact [news@dairycares.com](mailto:news@dairycares.com).*