

Dairy Cares News, August 2023

Farmers Are Helping Ensure Clean Drinking Water for All, While Innovating to Improve Long-Term Outcomes

Ensuring clean drinking water for all is a top priority for California dairy farmers, especially in the San Joaquin Valley, where both human-caused and naturally occurring contamination has led to impacted groundwater. Farming, including dairy farming, has added to nitrate contamination from the use of fertilizer to produce food and feed. Wastewater treatment, manufacturing, and food processing operations have also contributed. Naturally occurring contamination, such as arsenic, is also responsible. California dairy farmers are helping take action now—providing immediate solutions, while addressing challenges to improve long-term water quality outcomes.

Dairy farmers have joined with other farmers, food processors, manufacturers, and cities to ensure residents have access to clean drinking water now in their rural communities. As part of the Central Valley’s Nitrate Control Program, **local Management Zones** have formed to implement solutions in their communities. This includes ensuring all residents have access to free well testing and free replacement drinking water, while also beginning plans for long-term water supply solutions where needed.

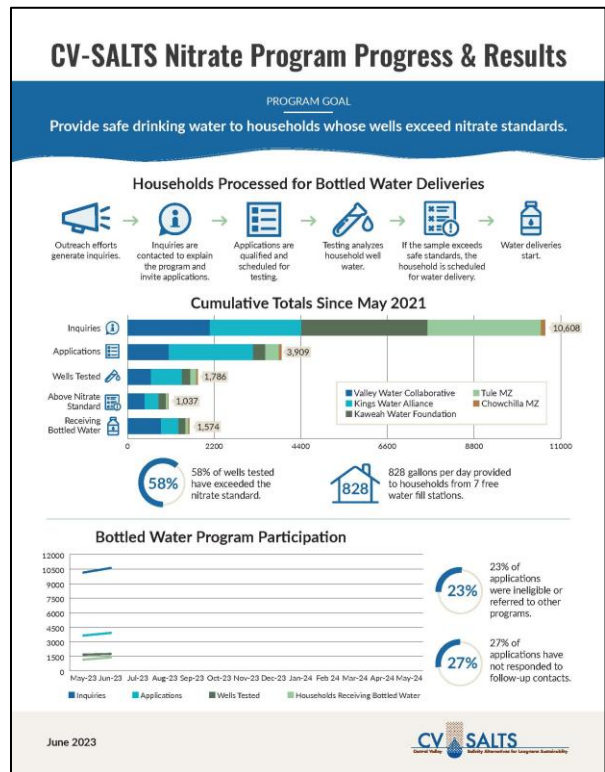
Priority 1 Management Zones (located throughout the San Joaquin Valley) have worked diligently to provide safe drinking water to households since May 2021. Priority 2 Management Zones are forming now and are expected to begin offering services in one to two years. Nearly all San Joaquin Valley dairy farms are located within Nitrate Management Zones and help to financially support the activities of those Management Zones. Participants have also worked diligently to develop programs and deliver results.

Connecting with and encouraging rural residents to apply for free well testing has been a critical and challenging first step. Efforts include direct mail and door-to-door flyer distribution, online and traditional media promotions, and community events. Diligence has paid off, resulting in continual growth in **program participation**. **To date, more than 1,800 rural residences have received free well testing, more than 1,100 households are currently receiving free drinking water deliveries, and more than 1,300 gallons have been delivered daily to Central Valley families via free bottle-filling stations.**

Water for All

Learn how farmers are helping ensure clean drinking water in rural communities.

PLANET-SMART DAIRY



[Click to learn](#) more about the Central Valley’s Nitrate Control Program and its progress and results to date.

“We’re proud to be supporting this broad-based effort to ensure that rural households in our communities have access to free well testing and safe drinking water,” said dairy farmer Justin Gioletti, a member of the board of directors of the Valley Water Collaborative, a non-profit organization operating Nitrate Management Zones in parts of Stanislaus and Merced counties. “This also provides important benefits for farmers and others in the business community, by allowing us the additional time we need to work together to address impacts to groundwater that developed in previous decades.”

While the delivery of clean drinking water is top priority, dairy farm families are also increasing their ongoing commitment to improving how groundwater is protected. Central Valley dairies operate under the most comprehensive water quality regulations in the nation and have started preparing for even more stringent regulations. Efforts include additional nitrate management education for farmers (provided through the California Dairy Quality Assurance Program) and a more robust reporting and data management system for dairies to document their improved water quality protection efforts (being developed through the Central Valley Dairy Representative Monitoring Program). Dairy farms are also piloting new technologies to improve the [recycling of manure nutrients](#), aiming to improve protection of water resources and create more sustainable farming models to benefit the broader agricultural industry.

In 2021, the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) convened a [Manure Recycling and Innovative Products \(MRIP\)](#) Task Force—a collaboration of farmers, academia, and public partners. The task force’s report has provided concrete steps to guide innovation and advancement, aiming to create value-added manure-based products, which can be used to boost soil health on other farms while reducing dependence on synthetic fertilizers and also reducing water quality and other environmental impacts related to surplus manure nutrients. One strategy being demonstrated and evaluated by researchers of University of California, Davis is the pelletizing of dairy manure and woody biomass to create a soil amendment to apply to almond orchards and potentially other crops. Vermiculture and several other promising new strategies and technologies are also being explored, in addition to efforts to expand the potential of existing strategies like on-farm composting. Dairy farmer organizations have sought and received grant funding to help bring more manure recycling projects to California farms.

Efforts to advance manure management are now getting a boost from CDFA’s new [Dairy Plus](#) program. The California Dairy Research Foundation (CDRF) and the CDFA, along with Dairy Cares and other industry partners, were awarded up to \$85 million by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) under the Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities program. Funding will leverage additional matching state funds and private capital investments to bring more full-scale projects to California dairies, reducing methane and better protecting groundwater. A total of 28 applications were received during this first cycle of the Dairy Plus program. Applications are now being reviewed, and the award announcement is anticipated for December. Projects awarded through the program will be measured and monitored by university researchers to quantify emission reductions and improved water quality outcomes.

California’s dairy farmers are dedicated to their communities—helping ensure the water resources they need today, while working toward a more sustainable future.

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.

