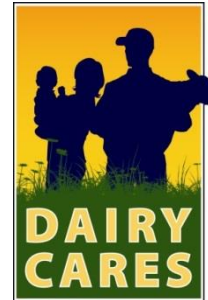


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## Dairy Cares Newsletter

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[DairyCares.com](http://DairyCares.com)

# Untold story behind dairy court challenges: Steady progress toward better water quality

Earlier this month, state water quality officials unveiled revised water quality protection regulations for Central Valley dairies. Now undergoing public review, these revised regulations propose to resolve and perhaps bring to an end nearly six years of court battles between anti-dairy activists and state regulators.

It is notable that courts dismissed most of the activists' challenges and to date, have upheld most of the original provisions of the Central Valley landmark dairy regulations, first adopted in 2007. Now it is up to the state's water board appointees – and possibly, the courts – to decide whether the most recent revisions mean the dairy regulations now finally meet “legal muster.”

While the legal wrangling goes on, we should not forget the critically important, real-world efforts thousands of dairy families have already made – and continue to make daily – to protect water quality. It is an indisputable fact that when it comes to dairies, actual environmental stewardship occurs not in a courtroom or boardroom, but at the farm itself. It can't be accomplished by a lawyer or a government employee – it must be a part of daily farm management, a decision made every time irrigation water or fertilizer is applied to a field, or a barn is cleaned, or plans are made to invest in or maintain corrals, equipment, berms and other important features of the farm.

While the legal arguments have gone back and forth since 2007, the dairy farmers have quietly stepped up to implement the regulations – rules that are agreed by all sides to be the most stringent in the nation if not the world. California dairy farmers are leaders in monitoring and managing groundwater resources and ensuring responsible storage and use of manure as a natural crop fertilizer. These efforts are spelled out, specific, tangible measures at all Central Valley dairies, including:

- Nutrient Management Plans, prepared by certified professionals, to assist in balancing application of fertilizer with crop needs to prevent excess fertilizer from percolating to groundwater;
- Engineered Waste Management Plans, to ensure that while manure is stored at dairies prior to timely use as a crop fertilizer, that nuisances are avoided;

- Extensive testing and monitoring of soil, irrigation water, manure and plant tissue to ensure that accurate information is on hand to guide farmers' decisions in the field; and
- Ongoing testing of thousands of wells to evaluate trends and ensure that management practices are effective in protecting water resources, and to inform where changes in management may be needed.

Dairy families have invested at least \$120 million in compliance activities since the original adoption of the regulations in 2007, and the average dairy spends between \$15,000 and \$25,000 annually in compliance costs. Meanwhile, dairy organizations have continued to invest in education, outreach, compliance assistance, cutting-edge groundwater monitoring coalitions, and research into improved management.

Lessons learned from other parts of the world have shown clearly that use of fertilizer of any type has potential to impact groundwater quality. In many cases, these are problems that have developed over many years and even many decades. The solutions aren't always clear and even the most optimistic scientists suggest that it could take many years to develop the technologies and practices that are needed to protect groundwater everywhere farming occurs.

The good news in California dairy country is that the efforts are already in full swing and will continue, both in daily management at farms and through broader monitoring, research and education efforts (we invite you to learn more at [here](#)). Through these efforts, dairy families can continue to provide delicious, nutritious and affordable dairy products to millions of families while protecting the natural resources we all share.

*Dairy Cares is a statewide coalition supporting economic and environmental sustainability and responsible animal care. Our members include Bar 20 Dairy Farms, California Cattlemen's Association, California Dairies Inc., California Dairy Campaign, California Dairy Research Foundation, California Farm Bureau Federation, Dairy Farmers of America-Western Area Council, Dairy Institute of California, GHD, Inc., Hilmar Cheese Co., Joseph Gallo Farms, Land O'Lakes, Merck Animal Health, Milk Producers Council, Ruan Transport Corp., Western United Dairywomen, Yosemite Farm Credit and others. For information, visit [DairyCares.com](http://DairyCares.com) or call 916-441-3318.*