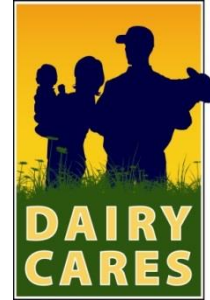


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## Dairy Cares Newsletter

March 2014

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

# Drought underscores decades-long progress of water efficiency by dairy farms, agriculture

California farmers, workers and residents are unfortunate witnesses to history. The Golden State is in the throes of one of the driest years since record keeping began in the 1800s. [Current reservoir conditions](#), [Sierra snowpack levels](#) and a [gubernatorial state of emergency declaration](#) are stark reminders of the seriousness of the situation.

The state's major reservoirs responsible for supplying fresh drinking and irrigation water sit considerably below historical averages. Shasta Lake, California's largest reservoir and a critical source of water for farms, sat 42 percent below its historical average and 54 percent below its total capacity as of March 27.

The Sierra snowpack, which is responsible for filling those reservoirs in the form of spring runoff, is at a meager 29 percent of normal. Moreover, the snowpack level in the north Sierra, which supplies spring runoff to the two largest reservoirs in California (Shasta Lake and Lake Oroville), stands at a paltry 21 percent of normal.

With no rain in sight, Governor Jerry Brown declared a drought state of emergency on January 17. His declaration charged state officials to take all necessary actions in preparation of drought conditions. The Governor also called on all Californians "to conserve water in every way possible," including a request for a voluntary 20 percent reduction in water use.

Such dire drought conditions are a call to action for all Californians. Fortunately, water conservation, efficiency and recycling has long been standard practice for California dairy farmers, who are accustomed to doing more with less. For decades, dairy farmers have steadily and dramatically reduced the amount of water they use to produce each gallon of milk. In fact, **dairy farmers have reduced the overall water footprint of a glass of milk by 65 percent since 1944**. In other words, producing a glass of milk today uses about a third of the water it did during the Franklin Roosevelt administration. ([Source: Capper, et al. \(2009\). Journal of Animal Science.](#))

Smart, responsible water use is integral to the daily operation of California dairies. Clean water is used to wash

cows, sanitize milking areas and cool milk tanks. Later, that water is reused to flush manure from barn floors. Finally, the water is recycled and blended with irrigation water to nourish crops used to feed livestock, such as corn and alfalfa.

Progress has continued in recent years, as California farmers show they can continue to feed millions of families while using steadily less water. According to the [Public Policy Institute of California](#), farmers applied 23 percent less water to their fields in 2005 than in 1980, about the time total agricultural water use peaked. Yet with less water over this same period, average crop yields increased by more than 40 percent.

California dairy families and farmers know water is a precious, finite resource that must be utilized efficiently and responsibly in both wet and dry years. Dairy families have shown their commitment to protecting natural resources as well as leadership on a number of sustainability issues, such as [air](#) and [water](#) quality, [greenhouse gas emissions](#), and [animal well-being](#). Add to that list a commitment to being water-wise as they continue to produce the affordable, nutritious and delicious dairy products millions of families have come to depend upon and enjoy.

*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.*