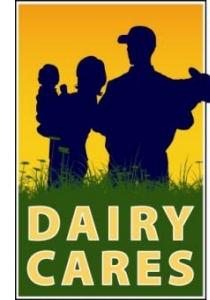


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## Dairy Cares Newsletter

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

# One year later: Dairy families make significant, commendable strides with Dairy FARM Program

Farmers know the statistic well – less than 2 percent of the U.S. population is directly involved in the day-to-day production of our nation’s food and fiber. Coupled with the fact most people are three to four generations removed from farm life, it comes as no surprise that consumers have questions about the hows and whys of farming, especially as they relate to farm animals. Many are simply seeking assurance that animals on today’s farms are treated ethically and responsibly by farmers.

Last year, the California dairy community took a huge leap forward to begin the process of providing that assurance to consumers. In March 2010, Dairy Cares members voluntarily announced they would participate in the National Dairy FARM (Farmers Assuring Responsible Management) Program.

Designed to validate steps dairy farmers take daily to care for their animals, the FARM Program includes a comprehensive set of animal care guidelines developed by veterinarians, animal scientists and dairy farmers (visit [www.NationalDairyFARM.com](http://www.NationalDairyFARM.com) for a complete list of the program’s guidelines).

Individual dairy farms in the program are evaluated, in-person, by a trained evaluator according to the guidelines. Initial on-farm evaluations are followed by a third-party program verification process where a representative statistical sampling of all farms in the program are reassessed by an outside, independent verifier.

June 2010 marked the beginning of on-farm evaluations here in California and since then, more than 575 dairy farms – about 35 percent of all California dairy farms – have been evaluated.

Art Van Beek, who operates his family’s dairy in Tipton, CA, was one of the first dairy farmers in the state to undergo a FARM Program evaluation.

“The process is thorough, it’s something you can learn from and it’s the right thing to do,” said Van Beek. “I believe if we can show people that we’re raising and caring for animals according to a set of ethical and scientific standards, instead of simply telling them, they will have confidence we’re committed to doing what’s right.”

## **Actions, not words**

Opening the barn door to show the public how animals are raised and cared for on today's farms is an ever-growing and important action dairy farmers are taking. Many utilize the internet to provide a look at what happens on their farms, writing blogs, posting videos, "Tweeting" or updating their Facebook status. Others provide tours to school children, media and academic groups.

Getting every consumer out to a dairy to see how animals are treated and cared for is impossible and impractical. However, the FARM Program offers another avenue for dairy farmers to educate the general public about responsible food production; and dairy farmers across California deserve credit for stepping up to the plate to participate voluntarily and aggressively.

Make no mistake – by opening their farms to be evaluated, the road chosen by dairy families is one of leadership and action. Rather than simply asserting they do a good job, dairy farmers are documenting and verifying their commitment to responsible animal care and well-being through participation in the FARM Program.

## **The future**

With one year of considerable progress in the books, the program's next stage – third party verifications – are set to begin in the summer of 2011 and conclude by the end of the year.

In light of the recent difficult fiscal years California dairy families have experienced, their commitment to participating in the National Dairy FARM Program is nothing short of impressive, but not surprising. These are the same families who provide ethical and responsible care to animals daily, a fact they want their consumers to know with verifiable, trustworthy information.

*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.*