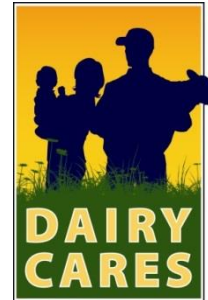


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Dairy Cares Newsletter

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Monitoring coalition offers a cost-cutting option for Central Valley dairy families

Editor's note: Due to the importance of a new opportunity for Central Valley dairies to join a groundwater monitoring coalition, we are devoting this month's column to reprinting a recent article from Ag Alert about the Central Valley Dairy Representative Monitoring Program.

By Tom Barcellos

As a longtime dairy owner in Tulare County, I have struggled along with my fellow milk producers through the recent, serious challenges that our industry has faced. This struggle doesn't appear to be over, as demonstrated by recent spikes in feed prices, coupled with volatile milk markets and other negative economic factors.

In such troubled times, no one should be surprised to see dairy producers greet the prospect of additional costs with frustration. Even so, it is important that dairy producers across the Central Valley take notice of a recent, historic opportunity to reduce their environmental compliance costs.

A new, non-profit coalition aims to help Central Valley dairy farmers conduct required groundwater monitoring as efficiently as possible. Earlier this year, I accepted the chairmanship of this coalition, called the Central Valley Dairy Representative Monitoring Program. Our non-profit coalition of dairy owners and operators proposes to conduct groundwater monitoring on behalf of its members.

Our purpose is simple: to help dairy producers comply with the law in the most inexpensive manner possible. Regulations adopted in 2007 require all dairy farms in the valley that don't already have groundwater monitoring wells to install them over the next few years. Dozens of dairies have already received orders to install wells and in time, all Central Valley dairies are scheduled to receive such orders. The costs of installing wells on individual dairies is significant, running into the tens of thousands of dollars at startup, with thousands more in annual sampling and reporting costs.

Our coalition offers a better alternative. A scientifically guided program will locate wells strategically on a representative set of dairies, instead of all dairies. Our program will be smaller, smarter and more efficient. It will generate the results to meet the regulatory compliance needs of our monitoring coalition members, but it will cost significantly less because fewer dairies will need to be monitored. We will pool our resources and pass the savings along to coalition members.

Most importantly, let me emphasize that our coalition is not for profit and it is organized and overseen by dairy farmers to ensure that all costs and fees are managed carefully and minimized.

Now is the time for dairy owners and operators to act to join this coalition. There are too many important details to include in a brief article, but all Central Valley dairies were mailed a detailed information packet in late October in a large navy blue envelope. The application and information materials can also be downloaded free, at www.dairycares.com/CVDRMP/.

You can also learn more about the program by contacting your producer trade association or creamery. But this is a decision you must make soon: The deadline for signing up to join the coalition is Dec. 27, and late applicants face a minimum late penalty of \$1,000.

Most of the important groundwork has already been completed and our coalition's program is now moving toward final government approval. Although you must submit an application before Dec. 27 to avoid a late penalty, no membership fees will be charged until all the necessary approvals have been finalized. Only then will membership dues be activated.

Our coalition leaders recognize that in times like these, even a small membership fee poses a significant burden for many dairy owners. But membership fees are significantly smaller than the costs of "going it alone" with individual monitoring. I urge all my fellow dairy producers to take this important opportunity to sharply reduce their environmental compliance costs.

Tom Barcellos, a third-generation dairy farmer from Porterville and member of the Tulare County Farm Bureau board of directors, serves as chairman of the Central Valley Dairy Representative Monitoring Program. This article is reprinted here with permission of the California Farm Bureau Federation.

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 or call 916-441-3318.