

Dairy consortium makes strides

The Southern Great Plains Dairy Consortium (SGPDC), which was officially formed in 2007, is making huge strides this year thanks to federal and allied industry funding, as well as the indispensable support of area dairy farmers.

The program, in essence, is a two-legged animal where one leg (teaching), is trying to re-establish a dairy teaching program in the southwest focused on hands-on training in large herd management.

To date, 11 universities struggling to maintain dairy science programs have signed on to the consortium, and New Mexico State University will be able to offer once again a minor in dairy science to their incoming students.

In 2009, we successfully concluded our second-year program; 22 students from 11 different universities descended upon Clovis for a six-week class offered through the consortium and sponsored by allied industry, co-ops, and dairy promotional and trade organizations.

This educational program wouldn't be possible without these financial contributions. But neither would it be possible without the local dairy producers opening their doors and letting students in to be taught about topics such as milk cow nutrition, animal handling and well-being, calf care and nutrition, and

milk quality, just to name a few.

On the research side of the consortium, things are happening as well. Through federal funding obtained through the help from our legislators, the consortium is now tackling several issues.

On one side we're expanding current air quality research with a d d i t i o n a l research conducted to look at particulate matter (dust), green house gasses and other emissions of interest, as well as the effect of certain management practices on these emissions.

Secondly we are in the process of collecting additional data for a national "Lifecycle of Milk" survey, a study which looks at the dairy as a whole and its management and farming practices to determine the carbon footprint of milk, also referred to as "The Cycle of Life."

Thirdly, we are digging deeper into the water usage issue on our dairies.

We know from previous studies that the total water usage on dairies is somewhere between two percent and three

percent of the total water diversion in the state.

We also know dairies recycle that same gallon of water three to five times for different purposes.

But we additionally would like to know which management practices further reduce this usage by looking at available state data and by measuring the partition of water on the dairy between drinking water and cleaning purposes, with the focus on management practices that can reduce this usage.

All these projects study the environmental impact and sustainability of New Mexico's No. 1 agricultural commodity — dairy. Dairy families live and work on the their farms and want to make sure their natural resources and environment are managed and protected well, in order for their children to be able to succeed in this family lifestyle as well.

For more factual information in regards to dairy farming in New Mexico, please check the Web site at <http://dairy.nmsu.edu>.

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