



Conservation Practices of U.S. Dairy Farms Participating in FARM Environmental Stewardship

OVERVIEW

The [FARM Environmental Stewardship \(ES\) Program](#) launched the Conservation Practice Questionnaire (CPQ) in August 2022 after significant stakeholder feedback and on-farm piloting. The questionnaire serves as an optional add-on to the FARM ES evaluation to capture additional information about dairy farmers' field and dairy-level conservation practices to capture a more holistic sustainability story.

Over 450 CPQs have been completed on dairy farms across 20 states ranging in milking herd size from 17 head to over 15,000. The completed conservation practice questionnaires offer a lens into the natural resource stewardship of participating dairy farmers. The following offers a summary of the questionnaires completed through March 2024; the data are not necessarily representative of all U.S. dairy farmers.

CONSERVATION PRACTICE QUESTIONNAIRE HIGHLIGHTS



U.S. dairy farms recycle resources to increase operational efficiency and practice resource stewardship. Of the 452 farms that have completed the CPQ:

- 68% use recycled manure, recycled sand or byproducts as bedding.
- 86% use byproducts as part of their lactating cow ration.
- 79% report reusing water: 76% reuse plate cooler water to flush the barn, as drinking water, or for other uses; 14% capture rainwater for cleaning or other use; and 29% reuse water for irrigation.



Over 97% of participating dairy farmers report using energy saving technologies and practices:

- 92% use energy efficient lighting, like LEDs.
- 78% use plate coolers.
- 78% regularly tune and calibrate equipment.
- 60% have variable speed drives (VSDs) on their milk or vacuum pump.
- 56% have a heat recovery system.



90% of participating farms report implementing field conservation practices like cover cropping (60%), no-till or conservation tillage (62%), crop rotation (80%), grassed waterways (55%), and more.

Of the 31% of farms that irrigate, water use stewardship practices are prevalent with around 83% using soil moisture monitoring, 88% performing regular maintenance / calibration of irrigation equipment, and 93% consider irrigation timing and amount according to various factors including plant stage, water availability, weather forecast, evapotranspiration, etc.

ADVANCING CONSERVATION

The FARM Program recently launched a new database to help farmers and their advisers identify technical and financial resources for implementation of conservation practices. The Conservation Practice Resources library, available [here](#), is a searchable database of financial and technical resources that are currently available for producers in the US. It contains information from government, non-profit, extension, state planning tools, and many other relevant financial or technical assistance providers and resources. Financial resources include grants, cost-share, loan programs and other incentives available. The database's first areas of focus are on resources for cover cropping, conservation tillage, energy efficiency, nutrient management, and pollinator habitat.

For more information about the Conservation Practice Questionnaire or the library of resources, please contact us at dairyfarm@nmpf.org.

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