

Study: Dairy farming practices can store carbon, reduce emissions

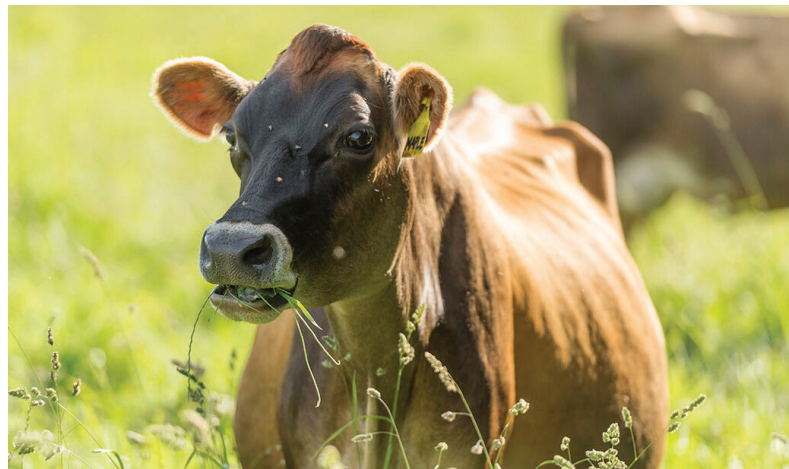
By **SIERRA DAWN McCLAIN**
Capital Press

A new study from the University of Wisconsin-Madison has found that many farming practices associated with organic dairies can help store carbon and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The peer-reviewed study, published in the August issue of the *Journal of Cleaner Production*, found that several practices that are common on organic dairy farms, including giving cows more time on pasture, can boost carbon sequestration in the soil and reduce overall emissions.

The study included life cycle assessments of organic dairies across the U.S. A life cycle assessment involves analyzing the environmental aspects associated with a product over its life cycle, including inputs and outputs — for instance, what feed goes in and what waste goes out.

This method, said lead researcher Horacio Aguirre-Villegas, can



Organic Valley

A dairy cow at Jon Bansen's Organic Valley farm.

“quantify the environmental impacts of a product, service or system.”

The researchers found the organic dairy farms that were studied — members of Organic Valley, a national dairy cooperative — emitted 0.94 kilograms of carbon dioxide equivalent per kilogram of fat-and-protein-corrected milk, a measure of carbon footprint.

This is a 24% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions compared to the average American dairy, a percentage calculated by comparing the new study to a previous life cycle assessment representing the U.S. dairy industry as a whole, published in the *International Dairy Journal*. It found that dairies on average emit 1.23 kg of carbon dioxide per kilo-

gram of milk. In reality, it's not a perfect apples-to-apples comparison, said Aguirre-Villegas, because the earlier study was done by different researchers using different methodologies, but the previous research is a “useful point of reference.”

What is clear from the new study, said Aguirre-Villegas, is that certain management techniques on dairy farms do reduce emissions and create a smaller environmental impact.

These practices include giving cows regular access to pasture, using minimal inputs, building healthy forages and pastures with well-developed root systems that store more carbon below ground, using a dry manure management system, using only organic fertilizers and growing most feed on the farm rather than importing it.

These practices are not exclusive to organic dairies.

Nicole Rakobitsch, Organic Valley's director of sustainability, said the study's exploration of carbon sequestration could be useful to both organic and con-

ventional dairy farms.

Aguirre-Villegas, the researcher, agreed that the study could prove useful to both conventional and organic dairies. Organic operations tend to already use more of these low-input, low-carbon-footprint practices, he said, but the study's findings are broadly applicable.

“Any farm can really adopt good practices to reduce their emissions,” he said.

Although Organic Valley's farms appear to already have a smaller-than-average carbon footprint compared to other dairies, Rakobitsch, of the co-op, said the company aims to continue improving by incentivizing its members to adopt environmentally friendly practices.

In a recent panel discussion, Jon Bansen, a farmer with Organic Valley, said he believes that adopting these practices has both improved his bottom line and helped the environment.

“You can only be environmentally sustainable if you're financially stable to begin with,” he said.

Owyhee Cattlemen's Association gets a new president

By **BRAD CARLSON**
Capital Press

Rex Hoagland brings 41 years of cattle and beef industry experience to his new role as the Owyhee Cattlemen's Association board president.

During that time span, ranching practices became more sustainable, carcass weights increased, and processors' efficiency and sanitary practices improved greatly, he said.

“I don't want to see our way of life go away,” Hoagland said. “It's an old way of life that, without it, people don't eat.”

Members of the Marsing, Idaho-based association are passionate about raising high-quality animals and have done well at sticking together to support their industry and way of life, he said. They manage herds based on what

the land can support.

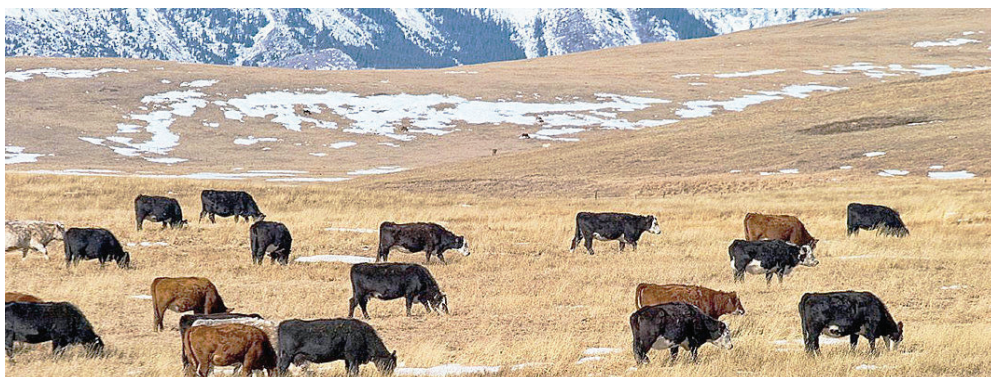
Hoagland will be the association's president for one year. Other board members include Jake Steiner of Oreana, vice president; and Oscar Evans of Homedale, past president.

Many association members now have years of experience with ranching practices that help sustain rangeland resources for the long term. Hoagland sees an opportunity to show land management agencies the value of those practices. Agency managers could use that information in making management decisions.

He said he supports “the ability to use abundant grass more.” For example, extending the time on some



Rex Hoagland



Idaho Rangeland Resource Commission

Cattle graze in Owyhee County, Idaho.

public-land grazing sites during this year's unusually wet spring could have reduced fire fuel loads in addition to benefiting cattle.

The U.S. Bureau of Land Management in recent years has provided more opportunity for targeted grazing, which aims to reduce fuel loads. Hoagland said this could be expanded by BLM and other agencies.

The approximately

100-member association historically advocates for adequate grazing rights and affordable fees on public land. It supports keeping rights and leases with a ranch when it's sold.

While oversight of government grazing leases is beneficial, “we need to allow the ranchers to manage their allotments to the best of their abilities,” said Hoagland.

He said the association and others in the industry are exploring an idea to tie fees and grazing density to the quality of a year's grass crop and the efficiency at which cattle gain weight. A challenge involves weighing animals over time as they move among jurisdictions.

Hoagland is director of cattle procurement for CS Packers, a large beef-processing plant in Kuna. He

manages his family's Walking Plow Ranch, which runs 80 head of mother cows in the Guffy area of Owyhee County.

He and his wife, Karen, and son J.D. last spring acquired a Homedale business they renamed Hoagland Meat. It provides custom kill and processing services, and sells prime and choice cuts at retail. Products of the USDA-inspected business can cross state lines.

Hoagland Meat's good early start reflects strong demand for high-quality beef sourced locally, Rex Hoagland said.

He is optimistic about cattle prices over the next three to four years, barring another COVID-19-like disruption or major plant closure. Factors include supply-reducing high input costs and construction of more processing plants.

July milk production up 0.2%

By **LEE MIELKE**
For the Capital Press

U.S. milk production is recovering slowly — very slowly. The Agriculture Department's latest data show July output hit 19.14 billion pounds, up just 0.2% from July 2021, and the first gain since October 2021. The 24-State July total came in at 18.3 billion pounds, up 0.3%.

Revisions lowered the 50-State June estimate by 45 million pounds to 18.93 billion, 0.1% below a year ago instead of the 0.5% increase originally reported.

July cow numbers totaled 9.416 million, up 1,000 head from June numbers, which were revised down 8,000 head. The July herd was down 67,000 from July 2021.

Output per cow averaged 2,033 pounds, up 19 pounds or 0.9% from July 2021. June output per cow was revised down 3 pounds, to 2,011 pounds.

California cows put 3.52 billion pounds of milk in the tank, up 77 million pounds or 2.2% from a year ago. Cow numbers were up 4,000 while output per cow jumped 40 pounds. Wisconsin cows produced 2.72 billion pounds, down 7 million or 0.3%. Cow numbers were down 6,000 but output per cow was up 5 pounds from a year ago.

Idaho was up 1.5% on a 25-pound gain per cow and 2,000 more cows. Michigan was down 3.8%, Minnesota was down 1.1%,

DAIRY MARKETS

Lee Mielke



and New Mexico was down 8.1% on a 32,000 cow drop. It was second only to Florida, which had the biggest decline, down 11.4%.

New York was unchanged, Oregon was up 0.9% on 1,000 more cows. Output per cow was unchanged. Pennsylvania was off 0.9%. South Dakota showed the biggest gain, up 13.1%, thanks to 20,000 more cows and a 10-pound gain per cow. Texas was up 6.0%.

Washington state was down 2.9% on 9,000 fewer cows, but output per cow was up 10 pounds.

Butter stocks down

U.S. butter stocks headed lower in July and remained well below a year ago. The latest Cold Storage report put the July 31 inventory at 314.4 million pounds, down 16.4 million or 5% from June's inventory, which was revised down 1 million pounds. Stocks were down 82.1 million pounds or 20.7% from a year ago, the 10th consecutive month they fell short of the previous year.

American type cheese stocks climbed to 859.9 million pounds, up 13.1 million pounds or 1.6% from June, and were 42.3 million or 5.2% above a year ago.

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