



# Minnesota Milk Update

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Minnesota NRCS State Technical Advisory Committee

# Dairy Heifer Inventory Trends

MN: 165,000 dairy heifers (3% ↑),  
cows down to 440,000

US heifers lowest since 1978 – 3.91M

Higher prices (\$2,600–\$3,000+)

More beef crossbreeding = fewer  
replacements

# Milk Solids Growth (Protein & Fat)

2024 milkfat avg:  
4.23% (record)

- Milk up 1%, but solids up 2%

Protein avg: 3.29%  
(up from 3.04% in  
2004)

Driven by genetics  
& nutrition

Supports cheese,  
butter production  
and sustainability



# H5N1 in MN Dairy Cattle



First case: Benton Co. (June 2024), latest: Stearns Co. (Mar 2025)



Symptoms: drop in milk, thick/clotted milk



Response: quarantine, milk dumped from sick cows



Monthly testing, enhanced biosecurity ongoing

# Carbon Intensity & Climate Markets



Processors paying for low-CI milk



Edge was working with Climate-focused grant, now will work toward Market focused grant

Continuing same work whether publicly or privately funded

Cheesemakers “doubling down” on sustainability efforts due to customer/market demand



Goal: establish market for verified low-CI milk

# Enroll in the Minnesota Milk Climate-Smart Project today!

We are taking a significant step toward empowering our members to achieve greater environmental sustainability and financial support through the Farmers for Sustainable Food Climate-Smart program.

With our partner, Farmers for Sustainable Food, we are opening enrollment for Minnesota Milk members in a multi-year sustainability project that provides opportunities and financial incentives.

The Farmers for Sustainable Food Climate-Smart Program uses data to inform decision-making regarding conservation practices and potentially adding value to the food produced on the farm.

Farmers will receive financial stipends based on their level of participation. Initial funding comes from an U.S. Department of Agriculture Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities award.

Minnesota Milk members who join the project now can receive financial compensation for participating this year and in the years ahead.

## **Financial compensation has three tiers:**

**Contributor:** Participants complete a simple greenhouse gas and carbon assessment based on current on-farm practices. No additional requirements. Contributors receive \$1,500 per year of participation.

**Cultivator:** Participants take a deeper dive into their farm data through more in-depth assessments of farming practices using tools such as COMET-Farm or other approved assessment tools. Cultivators receive an additional \$3,000 for a total of \$4,500 per year.

**Collaborator:** Farmers who connect to the supply chain by sharing data with downstream partners, like dairy processors, to help generate added value for commodities. Collaborators receive an additional \$4,500 for a total of \$9,000 per year.

The Farmers for Sustainable Food Climate-Smart Program stands out from others in an important way — there's no requirement for farmers to implement any specific practices. Rather, farmers determine the critical environmental concerns in their area and then, by using technical tools and resources available through the program, they can evaluate the impact their changes are making. Houston Engineering Inc. provides technical data assistance to farmers.

**Enrollment:** If you are interested in enrolling, send your contact information noting your interest in enrollment to: [climate-smart@voiceofmilk.com](mailto:climate-smart@voiceofmilk.com).

This is an exciting step for our members, and we encourage you to consider participating regardless of where you are in your farm's journey.

For more information, visit [farmersforsustainablefood.com/climate-smart/](https://farmersforsustainablefood.com/climate-smart/).

# Southeast MN Activities

## Driftless Area Ag Alliance

- New farmer-led group in SE MN (established Spring 2024)
- Showcases stewardship in sensitive karst region

## Minnesota Milk supports outreach & litigation

- Field days, media engagement, legal defense



# State Policy Highlights



DAIRI: Rebates for DMC premiums → higher enrollment



Milk Processing Tax Credit: Top priority for capacity



Rule 7020 lawsuit: MN Milk intervened



Permit reform: Support for concurrent local & state review



# Federal Engagement – Farm Bill



Push for mandatory 2x monthly payment (all milk)



Backing component test transparency



Support DMC, disaster aid, export trade programs



FMMO reform: pricing, make allowance update

# Planning for the Next Generation

High capital needs: barns,  
robots, storage



Aging farmer population



Young farmers need support  
(loans, grants)



MN Milk supports transition,  
succession, beginning farmers

# Manure is Not Ag “Waste”



Manure = nutrients (N, P, K, OM)



Adds soil health value vs synthetic fert alone



Financial value: \$300–\$500/cow/yr



Language matters: avoid ‘waste’ label



Promote it as a resource & asset



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# Questions?

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