Dairy Knowledge Summary

DRECA
Dairy Research and Extension Consortium of Alberta

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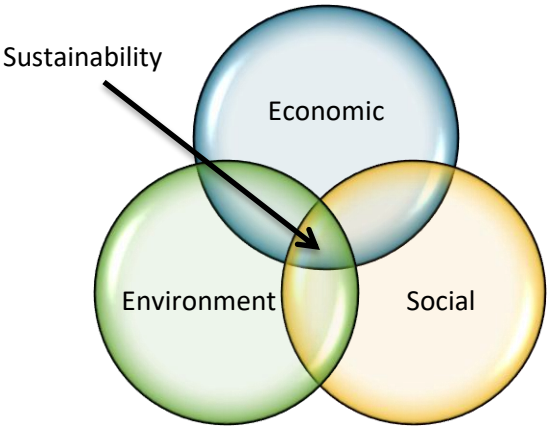
DAIRY FARMS +

The Canadian Dairy Production Sustainability Assessment Tool

Why is this important?

Sustainability is more than a buzz word. With respect to dairy farms, sustainability stands upon three pillars: economic, social, and environmental. The economic pillar includes consideration of farm income and expenses, return on investment, and management practices that provide improved profits at lower costs. The social pillar includes incorporating appropriate, continually improving animal care practices that maximize animal health and welfare, as well as consideration of worker well-being. The environmental pillar includes all aspects associated with environmental stewardship, such as water conservation, soil health, biodiversity, manure management, and appropriate use of crop inputs. For a producer to achieve sustainable dairy production, all three pillars must be addressed individually to determine where improvements can be made. Addressing sustainability as an industry ensures that we maintain consumer trust while doing the right thing for our animals and the environment – and that we do so in a profitable way.



What is *Dairy Farms +*?

Dairy Farms + is a free, interactive online tool developed to support Canadian dairy farmers in meeting their sustainability goals by adopting best practices to reduce their environmental footprints and maximize farm efficiency and productivity. The tool provides self-assessment questionnaires and a best management practices (BMPs) library with information and resources on environmental stewardship, farm management, economic performance, worker well-being, and animal care. This tool can also be linked to a farmer's production database (i.e. Lactanet) to minimize manual data entry and improve results.

What does *Dairy Farms +* do?

This tool includes three modules that allow producers to:

1) LEARN about BMPs and ASSESS your performance

- Understand sustainability issues and compare your practices with industry best practices
- Access a list of key resources to help you improve your performance and understand the potential benefits of these BMPs.

DRECA: Dairy Research and Extension Consortium of Alberta. A partnership in dairy research, extension and education activities. Alberta Agriculture and Forestry, Alberta Veterinary Medical Association, Alberta Milk, Lakeland College, University of Alberta, and University of Calgary.

What does *Dairy Farms +* do (Cont.)?

2) MEASURE and BENCHMARK your environmental footprint

- Understand the environmental issues facing dairy farms and compare your farm's environmental performance with the sector average.
- The environmental footprint can be displayed in terms of greenhouse gas emissions, water use, land use, and through a set of on-farm environmental indicators.

3) TAKE ACTION to improve your performance

- Quickly identify priorities based on the tool's recommendations
- Use the action planning tool to address priorities, build custom action plans and improve your sustainability performance over time.

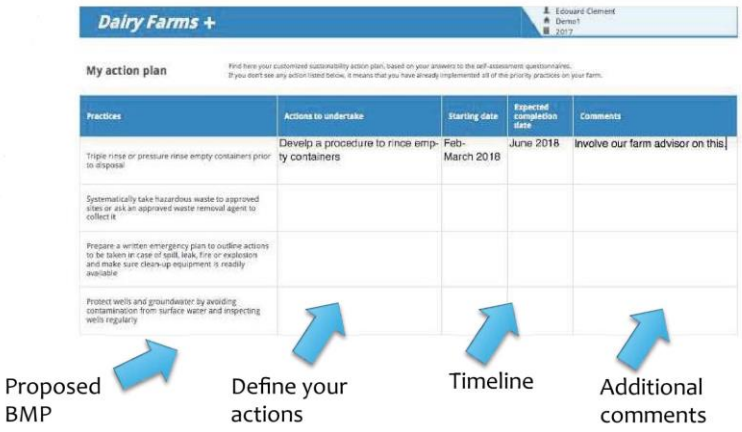
How do I use *Dairy Farms +* on my farm?

SELF-ASSESSMENTS

The first step in using *Dairy Farms +* on your farm is to complete the self-assessments. You can complete one or all seven of the topics and each assessment should take between 15-20 minutes to complete. Once a series of questions is completed, you will be directed to the results page, which displays your overall score (e.g. BMP adoption rate) and compares your score to the provincial and national average scores. More detailed results can also be viewed and, if a particular practice has not been adopted, you will have the option to add it to your custom action plan.

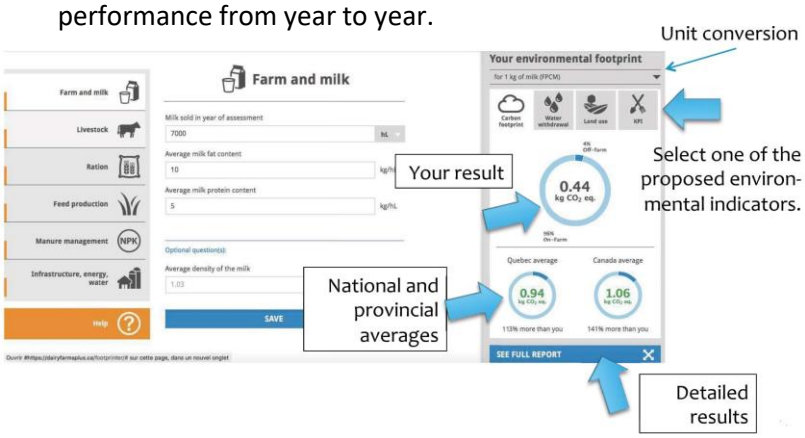
ACTION PLANS

Following the self-assessment, this tool will recommend BMPs for your farm. These recommended actions are identified with a green checkmark and can be added to the action plan. They can be edited and saved or printed as needed.



ENVIRONMENTAL FOOTPRINT

The environmental footprint module allows producers to measure their own farm's environmental footprint and compare it to the national and provincial averages. By estimating your farm's footprint, you can establish a baseline for monitoring and assessing your sustainability performance from year to year.



It is important for all dairy producers in Canada to strive toward sustainable production practices – both within their herds and in their fields. This tool can help the industry achieve success one farm at a time. For more information and to access the tool, visit: http://dairyfarmsplus.ca.

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