

Innovations Through Cost-Share Programs

XIV. Innovations Through Cost-Share Programs

Innovative and more effective and cost effective approaches and tools for managing manure are essential if dairies are to meet their own goals and growing public and regulatory pressure to address natural resource challenges. Instead of focusing on traditional best management practices, research, incentives, and cost-share programs need to shift their attention to include technologies and practices that not only provide comprehensive solutions to manure challenges, but hopefully turn manure into a value-added product. While traditional best management practices should not be abandoned, identification and implementation of innovative and more effective options is critical to the future viability of the dairy industry and improvement of air and water quality and public health.

The upcoming 2007 Farm Bill will play a critical role in the implementation of innovative approaches to manure management over the next 5-10 years and beyond. It is critical that the 2007 Farm Bill provide financial and technical assistance to researchers to continue developing,

and to producers to demonstrate and implement, improved and more effective technologies and approaches to resource management on dairy farms, and in agriculture in general. In particular, it is essential for the future of innovation and progress in manure management that Congress and the Administration increase funding in the 2007 Farm Bill for programs such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Conservation Innovation Grants Program, and Conservation Security Program (CSP) run by USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS); USDA's Agricultural Research Service (ARS); USDA's Cooperative State, Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES), US Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) grant programs dealing with animal agriculture, and other related programs.

Among the key policy and programmatic recommendations of the Council are:

- The selection processes by which

many state and federal programs award incentive and cost-share funds (also called "ranking systems") should encourage the adoption and implementation of innovative approaches and promising new technologies tied to achieving desired environmental goals and should reward higher levels of improvement toward defined environmental outcomes.

- Cost-share programs should encourage and fund demonstration projects developed specifically to illustrate defined environmental outcomes and benefits of promising new approaches and technologies.

- To ensure that NRCS funds are used for worthwhile, promising innovations and not wasted on untested or unproven technologies and practices, NRCS should work with key stakeholders in states or groups of states to form Technology Evaluation Teams composed of NRCS, ARS, and Cooperative Extension experts and qualified stakeholders and consultants to selectively evaluate proposed innovative projects and technologies.

- To ensure that the nation's producers and natural resources benefit to the greatest extent possible from the funds and valuable discoveries of ARS, Congress and the Administration should require that ARS, Land Grant Universities, NRCS, USEPA, Cooperative Extension, and other relevant agencies develop and maintain a more structured and coordinated means of technology transfer.

- Congress and the Administration should provide funding and direct NRCS to create a more comprehensive and ongoing mechanism to provide training as well as follow-up for operational and maintenance support to technical and field staff. This training should include developments in conservation science, environmental regulations, and effective tools and technologies for meeting conservation goals and operational needs.

