TOGETHER FOR A RESPONSIBLE FUTURE IN EUROPE

Farming forward with European dairy



Dairy, It's great inside.

#EUAgriPromo
#EnjoyItsFromEurope
#TogetherforaresponsiblefutureinEurope

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Farming Forward with European Dairy

From research to practice

In addition to the Paris Agreement, which aims to keep global warming below 2°C, the EU has also proposed a new growth strategy, the Green Deal, one of the objectives of which is to become the first climate-neutral continent by 2050. All sectors therefore have their work cut out for them. In its quest for a sustainable future, the food sector faces a major challenge: feeding the world's growing population while reducing the impact on the environment and climate. In the dairy sector, where increasing sustainability has been on the agenda for a long time, a lot of progress has already been made. Not only can the industry reduce its impact, but it is also part of the solution. Strengthening the sustainability of the sector is also one of the top priorities of the industry organisations. We can show that a lot of efforts have already been made along the entire value chain, both by the dairy farmers and the milk processors. In this document, we summarise the sectoral sustainability programmes for the dairy sector of five European countries. We showcase the main efforts and achievements and present you with the most recent intiatives, as it is essential that the debate on sustainability is based on facts and figures. That is the dairy sector's commitment, from grass to glass!



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Belgium - Sustainability monitoring shows progress across the dairy chain, from farmer to dairy processor

Enhancing the sustainability of the entire dairy sector is a key priority for MilkBE. This is evident from the latest Sustainability Report published by the industry organisation. Since 2014, sustainability efforts have been monitored at every stage of the dairy supply chain, and the most recent results (2022) show that significant progress has already been made.

98% of dairy farmers are taking part

Since 2014, the dairy sector has been working to improve sustainability across the three stages of the supply chain: on the dairy farm, during transport and at the processing stage. This has become an almost unavoidable issue, and more than **98%** of all Belgian dairy farmers are taking part. On average, a dairy farmer implements **20.6** of the **42** possible sustainability initiatives, compared with just **11.3** of the **35** initiatives during the baseline assessment carried out with the same group of farmers in 2015. In recent years, dairy farmers have made considerable efforts in various areas, such as animal welfare, energy, the environment, climate and water.

Energy-saving measures are popular

Due to the recent energy crisis, dairy farmers invested heavily last year in energy-saving measures. As a result, 48 per cent of Belgian dairy farmers now generate green energy via solar panels, a micro-biogas plant or a wind turbine. For the same group of farms analysed in the first round six years ago (known as the baseline measurement), the figure was just 27 per cent. The installation of energy-saving light bulbs has also risen sharply, from 14 per cent to 52 per cent. Finally, more than half of Belgian dairy farmers have a heat recovery system, a pre-cooler or a solar water heater.

The dairy industry is investing in water reuse

The dairy industry is also working to reduce its energy consumption. Over the last 10 years, this has fallen by 22 per cent per litre of processed milk. CO_2 emissions from milk processing have also fallen by 24 per cent. It is water consumption that has seen the greatest reduction, namely 29 per cent. Furthermore, the dairy industry has clearly invested in water reuse in recent years, and around 34 per cent of the water used comes from alternative sources, such as treated wastewater or water generated during the production of dairy products, such as milk powder.

1,839
Belgian dairy farmers have completed an individual climate scan

73%
are actively investing in optimising feed efficiency

70%
produce their own green energy.

64%
have cow brushes in their barns to improve cow comfort.

16%
assess animal welfare using an application or scoring system.

60%
use alternative water sources, such as rainwater.

18%
engage in social activities, such as tourism activities, school visits or the sale of their own products.

69%
use by-products from the food industry.

Continuing to strengthen sustainability

MilkBE remains committed to strengthening sustainability in the dairy sector. To this end, we have been working on upgrading and digitising the Sustainability Monitoring programme, which was recently launched in both Flanders and Wallonia, with a greater focus on climate (including, amongst other things, measures to reduce methane emissions) and animal welfare. Finally, investment in the dairy industry, which reached an all-time high of 180 million euros in 2022, has demonstrated that innovation and the pursuit of greater sustainability will also continue within this sector.

Hof ter Galeien

a sixth-generation dairy farm in Nazareth (East-Falanders), is working to improve both sustainability and profitability by focusing on soil health. The farm uses herb-rich grasslands with clover and alfalfa to reduce fertilizer use and reliance on imported soy, while improving the quality of home-grown feed. They also experiment with local protein crops such as field beans and triticale as alternatives to imported feed.

To enhance soil quality, the farm applies manure management techniques, wood chips, reduced tillage, and non-inversion cultivation. It aims to create a local circular economy by sourcing inputs within a 20-kilometre radius and collaborating with nearby arable farmers.

The farm is largely energy self-sufficient, with solar panels and battery storage covering about 70% of its electricity needs. It also participates in the European ClimateFarmDemo project, sharing climate-smart farming practices with other farmers across Europe. The owners believe that productive dairy farming and healthy soils can go hand in hand through continuous innovation and long-term commitment.

A healthy soil is the foundation for more sustainable, resilient, and economically viable dairy farming.

Steven Van Der Looven & Isabelle Baekelandt
Melkveebedrijf Hof ter Galeien
9810 Nazareth-De Pinte,
East-Flanders, Belgium

"We are constantly seeking a good balance between sustainability and profitability. That search begins quite literally from the ground up: good soil management is the key."



More information:

French
www.milkbe.org/fr/themes/durabilite

Dutch
www.milkbe.org/nl/themas/duurzaamheid

Denmark - How climate and sustainability is part of Danish dairy industry's ambitions and operations

The Danish dairy industry is building a common framework to measure emissions and drive climate action across the entire value chain.

Text: Maiken Voigt, Head of Sustainability Danish Dairy Board

In 2020, the Danish government passed the Danish climate law with a goal to reduce national greenhouse gas emissions by 70% in 2030 compared to 1990 – 55%-65% for the agricultural sector. To track progress, national inventory reports are published every second year.

The Danish dairy industry wants to play an active role and take a shared responsibility to reduce carbon emissions.



Goal for national greenhouse gas emissions in 2030 compared to 1990 for the agricultural sector

Industry-wide climate accounting

Since 2022, the Danish Dairy Board has been accounting for emissions related to the Danish dairy industry according to the framework of Science Based Targets and Greenhouse Gas Protocol.

Greenhouse gas accounting provides insights into where most emissions occur in the value chain. Usually, emissions from raw milk take up 80%-90% of the total footprint.

The Danish Dairy Industry's Climate Check

In the toolbox is Climate Check (FarmAhead™ Check) – a tool that calculates a dairy farm's carbon footprint of raw milk. The tool calculates the footprint based on internationally recognized standards; ISO 14044, International Dairy Federation's global Carbon Footprint standard for the dairy sector, and emissions from animals, manure, and soils are based on Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's methodology.



This is how it works:

- **The farmer submits data to around 200 questions in an online questionnaire once every year.**
- **The data is then validated by an external agricultural advisor, who makes a physical visit to the farm.**
- **The advisor reviews the data, talks over the results with the farmer, and advises the farmer about the strength and improvement areas for the farm.**
- **After being validated by the advisor, the data goes through a statistical analysis to check for discrepancies and anomalies**
- **Once passed, the data will be part of a compiled dataset with data from all farms representing each specific dairy.**
- **The dataset will be used in every dairy's individual climate accounting.**
- **In addition, the dataset generates insights and benchmarks, which is only possible because the tool creates comparability between farms.**

The data from climate check is also used in the Danish dairy industry accounting where data from all Danish farms is used as one big dataset, which is used to track progress towards Danish industry ambitions.

One thing is getting the data right, track performance over time, and knowing where your emissions come from. Another thing is actively investing in measures that will reduce emissions on farms.

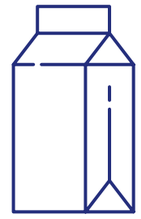


The Danish Dairy Industry's Incentive model

An example of how to drive behavioral change is by providing rewarding points to farmers for their sustainability-related activities. This is done in the Danish Dairy Industry's Incentive model where different sustainability actions are described and if the farmer meets the specific criteria for an activity, they are rewarded with points. The activities with the biggest improvement potential trigger the most points – both regarding lowering the farmers carbon footprint as well as improving protection of nature.

The point system is built to enable the dairy companies to reward their farmers by the number of points that the farmer achieves in the incentive model as part of their milk price. This way farmers are incentivized to invest in sustainability actions on their farms as they are rewarded for their work to reduce their carbon footprint and improve protection of nature.

All in all, the two industry wide climate tools provide a great opportunity to anchor farmers' sustainability activities into the green transition.



More information:
https://fvm.dk/arbejdsomraader/landbrug/aftale-om-groen-omstilling-af-dansk-landbrug

‘France Terre de Lait’*, integrating economic, social and environmental challenges



‘France Terre de Lait’plan launched in 2020 embodies a desire to integrate economic, social and environmental challenges into the dairy industry’s sustainable development strategy. It respects the founding principles of the ISO 26 000 “social responsibility” international standard: transparency, openness, dialogue with stakeholders and the implementation of continuous and sustainable progress, with transparent KPI’s and regular monitoring of progress.

‘France Terre de Lait’ is a volontary continuous improvement initiative that brings together all stakeholders in the French dairy sector: producers, private and cooperative processors, stakeholders in the retail and catering sectors.
It is based on four areas for improvement and eight concrete, measurable commitments.

*France, land of Milk

‘France Terre de Lait’ in brief

Economic and social performance

- Improve the sector’s capacity to remunerate all of its stakeholders
- Improve working conditions for an attractive sector

Food safety performance

- Guarantee the absence of antibiotic residues in milk. Continue the fight against antibiotic resistance
- Strengthen health and safety security

Responsible performance

- Assess the welfare of dairy herds and improve practices if necessary
- Improve the carbon footprint of the secto

Nutrition performance

- Inform about the essential place of dairy products in a balanced diet, and about their production methods
- Promote sustainable export while respecting local sectors and food cultures

71% of farmers involved in the Low carbon Dairy farm programme

2,000 trained advisors

What is the current state of this trend in 2025?

53% dairy products lead the way in food trust

More than one in two French people say they have absolute confidence in dairy products – a record high that exceeds the sector’s own targets by 2 percentage points.

Another positive indicator: since the survey was first conducted in 2016, milk and dairy products have remained the food category that inspires the most confidence – ahead of fruit, vegetables, fish and meat.

7.8/10 farmers love their job

This is the highest score in the farmers’ social barometer, which has been measured annually since 2019. On a scale of 1 to 10, commitment to the profession scores 7.8, whilst further efforts are needed on the indicators of profitability (6.0) and income (5.8).

French dairy farmers are deeply passionate about what they do. This is a strong signal and a foundation on which to build the sector’s attractivity.

55.4% ow-carbon transition target exceeded

The ‘Low-Carbon Dairy Farm’ initiative aimed to engage 50% of French dairy farmers by the end of 2025. This target has now been exceeded: more than 55% of them are taking part in the initiative, supported by over 2,000 advisers trained in the CAP’2ER® environmental assessment tool to support them.

This collective effort is reflected in the figures: between 2016 and 2022, the net carbon footprint of milk leaving the factory decreased by 7.1%.

73% animal welfare becomes standard practice

Nearly three-quarters (73%) of French dairy herds have now undergone a welfare assessment through the BoviWell scheme, which is based on the Charter of Good Farming Practices – an increase of 37% in one year, signalling real momentum on the ground. Among the farms assessed, 81% achieved an ‘excellent’ or ‘superior’ score.

The scheme, based on the European scientific Welfare Quality® method, goes beyond diagnosis: it includes an individual improvement plan for each farm.

In summary, the latest ‘France Terre de Lait’ report paints a picture of a sector that is making progress on its commitments, even in a challenging climate. Some targets have been achieved ahead of schedule, consumer confidence is at an all-time high, and there is genuine momentum on the ground. ***“These results place a responsibility on us: the sector has proven that it can deliver, and for that very reason, it cannot afford to stop now,”*** said Marie-Andrée Luherne, Deputy Chair of the CNIEL.

In a changing world, the dairy sector therefore continues to move forward, with rigour and ambition, guided by strong principles: responsibility, continuous progress, transparency, listening and dialogue.



The GAEC Vent des landes participates in the Low Carbon Dairy farm programme.

The assessment prompted **Didier Georgeault** to adopt a more dynamic grazing management approach.

“I move the cows to different pastures more regularly in smaller paddocks to limit trampling and promote grass regrowhth, thus yielding a greater quantity of forage per paddock” he explains.

“This assessment allowed us to compare ourselves to other farmers, identify areas of improvement and also verify the validity of certain options”. Among the other practices reinforced he cites all the measures taken to improve the farm feed self-sufficiency.

More information:
https://dairy-products-from-france.com/france-the-land-of-milk

Germany - Innovation and entrepreneurship supporting continuous improvement in dairy farming

Germany has established a comprehensive responsible framework for dairy production through the QM Sustainability Module, which has been implemented across the German dairy sector since 2020. The module enables participating dairies and farmers to assess sustainability performance based on scientifically developed indicators covering animal welfare, environmental protection, economic resilience and social responsibility.

Whether it's with the voluntary fire brigade, helping to organise the village fair or serving on committees at their dairy - without their commitment, many things simply wouldn't be possible. 67% of the approximately 12,000 dairy farmers surveyed are involved in voluntary work (either work-related or outside the farming sector), contributing an incredible 744,167 hours of voluntary work year after year!

32
dairy companies

12,000
dairy farmers

involved in the programme

59%

of dairy farms generate renewable energy either on their own premises or in communal facilities.

67%

of the dairy farmers surveyed are involved in voluntary work.





Fraederk Meppen operates a modern dairy farm with integrated arable farming in Lower Saxony. Alongside managing his family farm, he is involved in agricultural consulting, software development and knowledge transfer, applying innovative approaches to everyday dairy farming.

One of the farm's key priorities is making the best possible use of its grassland and home-grown forage. Through intensive and sustainable grassland management, efficient cooperation with neighbouring farms and a strong focus on forage quality, the farm produces more than 6,000 litres of milk per cow from home-grown feed. This approach can help reduce the need for purchased feed while supporting efficient resource use and strengthening the farm's resilience.

> "Sustainability is not achieved through a single measure, but through continuous improvement and informed decisions every day. Innovation, technology and entrepreneurial thinking help us further develop our farm while producing milk responsibly."

Fraederk Meppen,
Dairy farmer and entrepreneur
Friedeburg, Niedersachsen, Germany

Digital technologies also play an important role. By using SNP-based genetic analysis (KuhVision), the farm can make more informed breeding decisions with the aim of supporting herd health, efficiency and longevity over time. Artificial intelligence is increasingly being integrated into herd management, helping to analyse data and support day-to-day decision-making.

Efficient organisation is another cornerstone of the business. With the digital planning tool PlanR, daily work processes are organised more efficiently, supporting labour management and long-term farm development.

Beyond the farm gate, Fraederk actively communicates about modern agriculture through social media. By sharing insights into everyday farming practices, innovative technologies and sustainable farming approaches, he contributes to greater transparency, public understanding and dialogue between farmers and consumers.

Fraederk's approach illustrates how dairy farms can combine innovation, digital technologies, efficient resource management and knowledge sharing to continuously develop their operations and contribute to the long-term sustainability of the sector.

More information:
https://qm-milch.de/nachhaltigkeitsmodul/

Ireland - Sustainability in Action on Irish Dairy Farms

Irish Dairy farmers are committed to reducing their environmental impact, and protecting an indigenous industry that produces high quality dairy products relied on for essential nutrition by millions of people, at home and abroad.

There are a number of educational resources and programmes available to Irish dairy farmers to help improve sustainability on farms. Two examples of sustainability programmes are detailed below.

The **Sustainable Dairy Assurance Scheme (SDAS)** was developed by Bord Bia in collaboration with key stakeholders to demonstrate the sustainability of Irish dairy production in a systematic way at individual farm level. The primary objectives of the Sustainable Dairy Assurance Scheme are:

- To demonstrate to **milk processors and customers of dairy products that milk produced on certified farms meets the highest Bord Bia standards including those for animal welfare, traceability, environmental protection, and food safety**
- To provide proof that milk produced on certified farms is produced **under an ISO accredited sustainability and quality assurance scheme**
- To provide a **uniform mechanism for recording and monitoring**
- To set out the **criteria for best practice in dairy farming**.

The **Farming for Water (FFW)** project was launched in March 2024 under the European Innovation Partnership for Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability (EIP-AGRI). This ambitious project aims to **address water quality challenges while delivering additional environmental benefits**. FFW fosters collaboration among farmers, researchers, policymakers, and other stakeholders to co-develop and refine innovative solutions. By focusing on practical and scalable measures, the project seeks to improve water quality and promote sustainable agricultural practices.

Over
15,500
Irish dairy farms are members of the Bord Bia Sustainable Dairy Assurance Scheme, accounting for
99%
of production





“Being involved in the Farming For Water programme has given us an understanding of how water moves on our farm and where we can make improvements. The ASSAP advisor from our co-op, Aurivo, gave practical and easy to implement advice suited to our farm. The program helped us put measures in place that will benefit water quality on our farm. It has been a positive experience providing both advice and funding to make changes that provide a more sustainable future for farming.”

Yvonne Connelly,
Tuam, Co. Galway.
NDC Farmer Ambassador and Dairy Farmer



More information:
https://farmingforwater.ie/

Dairy products play an important role in our lives. How are they perceived?

Between 2024 and 2026 we conducted 3 surveys to measure the opinions and attitudes towards the dairy sector and dairy products among 1 000 people between 18 and 45 in Belgium, Denmark, Germany and Ireland.

The results helped us to better understand the link between sustainability and dairy products from the consumer's point of view.

Here are the average key findings from our three-year survey:



97%

of the respondents consume dairy.
70% of them consider dairy products as being important / essential in their diet.

Yoghurt is mainly consumed for its **taste 45%**, its **nutritional value 41%**
The third most important reason changed in the overall opinion over three years from "versatility" to **"being good for gut health" 37%.**

69%

of European consumers agree that dairy products are affordable sources of protein, calcium and vitamin B12

52%

of the consumers know about the European Dairy sector's efforts to improve its impact on the planet

Survey conducted from 2024 - 2026 by Potloc, collection via social media and CAWI. Quotas for global sample and per country: age, with or without children, gender of parents, age of parents, age of children.

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