

## Conservation Puts Dollars in Dairy Farmers' Pockets

**A** new report showcases four Pennsylvania dairy farmers and their successful adoption of conservation measures. It also shows how financial and technical support provided by the food industry supply chain and others helped the farmers bridge the gaps between adopting conservation measures and an ROI.

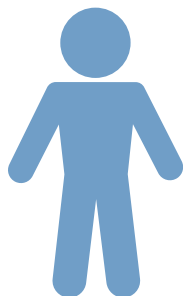
"The farmers that we worked with all experienced savings and reduced costs based on labor, fuel costs, as well as improved herd health," says Chris Sigmund, president of TeamAg Inc., an agriculture consulting firm in Pennsylvania with expertise in securing funding.

The report, "How conservation makes dairy farms more resilient, especially in a lean agricultural economy," prepared by Environmental Defense Fund and K-Coe Isom, involved case studies performed with four farmers.



### FARMER A:

Found that a manure separator delivered significant benefits, including reduced mastitis, bedding costs and mortality. Cost savings included \$51,000 per year in veterinary costs and \$7,225 per year in reduced mortality.



### FARMER B:

Observed immediate water quality impacts from implementing low-cost conservation measures such as no-till. The practice also eliminated his need to purchase nearly \$15,000 of feed per year.



### FARMER C:

Gained significant value from grant and cost-share programs, such as PennVest and NRCS's EQIP program, which enabled him to implement conservation infrastructure projects.



### FARMER D:

Found that transitioning to no-till led to numerous benefits, such as labor cost savings of \$44,100 per year and fuel cost savings of \$2,625 per year.


The operations involved varied from 40 to 750 cows. The studies focused on five of the most common conservation practices for reducing soil erosion and nutrient loss from dairy farms in Pennsylvania: manure storage, stream fencing, cover crops, conservation tillage and nutrient management, according to Lindsay Reames, director of sustainability and external relations with the Maryland and Virginia Milk Producers Cooperative Association.

Reames notes, in her experience, dairy farmers often see the conservation gaps that exist on their operations: where they currently stand in the process of implementing measures that improve soil health and water quality and where they want to be. In that no-man's land of the middle are the hurdles that must be bridged, such as contradictory or burdensome legislative policies, cumbersome application processes and paperwork, and high levels of out-of-pocket costs on the front end.

To that end, leaders in the dairy supply chain and others partnered to help the farmers, essentially funding 100% of the cost of the conservation and nutrient plans.

"Through the partnership with Turkey Hill Dairy and the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay, we were able to get a conservation innovation grant for just under half a million dollars," Reames says.

With help from TeamAg and the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay, additional funding totaling \$2 million was secured for adopting conservation measures.

"We're using that on our member farms to invest in practices such as manure storage, barnyard stabilization, and planting buffers," Reames says. "They're going to directly impact local waterways within the community." 

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