



For Immediate Release

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COWS Act Aims to Boost Dairy Profitability and Sustainability

WASHINGTON, D.C., July 25, 2023 – Senators Alex Padilla (D-CA) and Sherrod Brown (D-OH) today introduced the Converting Our Waste Sustainably (COWS) Act. Representatives Jim Costa (D-CA), David Valadao (R-CA) and Chellie Pingree (D-ME) introduced a companion bill in the House (H.R. 4327).

The COWS Act would establish a new federal program aiming to improve economic viability and sustainability for the dairy and livestock industry. The voluntary program will provide resources to help the dairy and other livestock operations can move to alternative manure handling systems that achieve three goals: (1) improve water quality (2) boost profitability by modernizing technologies for manure management; (3) improve air quality and foster climate-smart farming by reducing methane emissions.

Over the last few years, the dairy industry has faced many challenges including drought, increasing feed costs, labor shortages, a fluctuating milk market, Covid-19 and most recently flooding. Milk prices are below production, leaving dairy farmers with few resources to invest in new infrastructure.

“Dairy farmers are working to implement climate-smart manure management practices, and the COWS Act will offer the needed resources to enhance both air and water quality,” said Rob Larew, National Farmers Union President. “The COWS Act manure management practices will lower methane emissions, providing practical solutions that dairy farmers are eager to adopt in their efforts towards becoming more sustainable.”

The program proposed in the COWS Act is modeled on a successful and very popular incentive program that started in California in 2017, the Alternative Manure Management Program (AMMP). Since then, the California Department of Food and Agriculture has awarded 147 dairies a total of \$88 million for equipment that reduces methane emissions. Two to three times more farmers have applied than there has been funding available. Grants have covered the costs of various types of equipment to scrape manure from barns and into compost piles instead of flushing it into lagoons, separate and dry out or compost manure solids, build compost pack barns or other infrastructure to aerate manure, and increase the amount of time cows spend on pasture — all of which reduce methane emissions.

“Getting the AMMP award sped up our plans to modernize our manure management system by about 10 years. Dairy farmers in the San Joaquin Valley are chomping at the bit to get more

tools that improve their environmental sustainability,” said Paul Danbom of Brindeiro & Danbom Dairy Farm in Turlock, CA.

“As a business looking to bring climate smart products to consumers, we see the value in supporting farmers with modernizing their operations,” said Travis Forgues, Executive Vice President of Membership of Organic Valley. “ We are excited to support the COWS Act.”

Inclusion of the COWS Act in the next farm bill’s conservation title will fill an important gap in the farm conservation toolbox by implementing manure management practices that will work on farms of all sizes, reduce methane and nitrous oxide emissions, and help boost the profitability of the dairy and livestock sector.

For more information:

- [Summary of the COWS Act](#)
- [H.R. 4327](#)
- [Senate bill link](#)

Additional quotes:

“The COWS Act will provide crucial nutrient management resources to dairy farmers, who are currently struggling because milk prices fall well below their production costs. Passage of the COWS Act will enable dairy farmers to adopt practical climate-smart nutrient management methods that improve air and water quality and achieve their environmental sustainability goals.”

— Lynne McBride, California Dairy Campaign & California Farmers Union

“Our alternative manure management grant in California gave us the opportunity to demonstrate innovation and modernization. This new equipment helps us do the right thing for our cows, our team, our community and the environment.”

— Luciana Jonkman, Diamond J Dairy, Merced County, CA

“You have to be interested in reducing methane emissions not because you have to but because you want to and it’s good for business and the climate. California’s Alternative Manure Management Program is a great opportunity, a no-brainer to get great projects done that help dairy operations.”

— Ty Renati, Renati Dairy, Sonoma County, CA

“In today’s retail market many consumers and brands are increasingly looking for dairy food products with climate friendly origins, this bill helps dairy farmers cost-share technologies, facilities and practices to retrofit farms to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. For a lot of the farmers I work with, which are small to mid-sized, methane digesters just do not make practical or economic sense, so legislation that offers more options farmers can use to manage the animal manure we need for growing crops is a good idea.”

— Scott Stoller, Organic Valley Board member and dairy farmer from Sterling, Ohio

“Because of the popularity of the Alternative Manure Management Program among California dairy producers, we are eager to see a complementary source of USDA funding so producers across the country can benefit.”

— Renata Brillinger, California Climate & Agriculture Network (CalCAN)

“The COWS Act creates an important shift toward supporting more climate-friendly livestock solutions. Reducing greenhouse gas emissions while increasing farm profitability means a win-win proposition for farms and the environment.”

— Cathy Day, National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition

“Sustainable manure management is a critical conservation priority for dairy farmers as the industry works to achieve its voluntary, producer-led goal of becoming greenhouse gas neutral or better by 2050. However, conservation programs continue to be oversubscribed, preventing dairy from making its greatest possible contribution to the nation’s greenhouse gas reduction. We thank Reps. Jim Costa, D-CA, David Valadao, R-CA, and Chellie Pingree, D-ME and Sens. Alex Padilla, D-CA, and Sherrod Brown, D-OH, for introducing the bipartisan, bicameral COWS Act which will elevate the emphasis on a variety of manure management systems important to dairy’s stewardship priorities.”

— Paul Bleiberg, National Milk Producers Federation