



# TEXAS ASSOCIATION OF DAIRYMEN

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## **DAIRY PRODUCERS GO ABOVE AND BEYOND TO PROTECT THE ENVIRONMENT**

By John Cowan

When it comes to protecting the environment, dairy producers have a lot of different regulatory agencies to listen to on both the state and federal levels. So what would compel a producer to set even higher standards for himself and his dairy and – in the process – possibly open himself up to penalties?

I submit it is a love of the land and the desire to preserve it. Dairy producers make their living off the land, drink the local water and breathe the air. They have plenty of reasons to want to protect their environment.

That's why 108 dairy farms have signed up for the Agriculture Producer Certification Option (APCO), a voluntary program started in 2002 by the Texas Association of Dairymen and the Texas Cooperative Extension Service, Environmental Management Solutions, Inc. and Tarleton Institute for Applied Environmental Research. Cooperating partners include the Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board (TSSWCB), the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ), the Brazos River Authority, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Texas Department of Agriculture.

In the first of three intensive phases toward APCO certification, the dairy producer will open up his entire operation – not just the portion regulated under law – to review by third-party assessors. The producer must address any concerns raised during the assessment process before proceeding through the program.

The APCO review looks at the whole farm, resulting in a detailed comprehensive evaluation that the dairyman uses to help manage his farm in an environmentally responsible way. If concerns are discovered, the farmer works with the TCEQ in a cooperative manner to resolve any issues.

Under the second phase of APCO, the dairy must complete a Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan (CNMP). Dairies who complete phase two will have achieved a high standard of environmental commitment.

To date, three dairies have had their CNMP certified by the TSSWCB. Additional dairies are awaiting word on their status for completion of this second phase, and still other dairies are expected to reach this level in the coming weeks.

The final phase of APCO comes a year after approval of a CNMP. The dairy must undergo a follow-up evaluation. If this compliance evaluation continues to meet APCO goals, the farm will be awarded APCO certification. Thereafter, the dairy must pass an annual environmental audit to retain the certification.

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None of the on-site reviews of the dairies performed throughout the APCO certification process are easy. They all use the On Farm Assessment and Environmental Review (OFAER) assessment, a dairy-industry specific measurement used and recognized nationally.

This assessment expects performance above and beyond that required by state and federal regulators to stay in business.

The dairies that have taken the time and made the effort to achieve APCO certification deserve recognition not only from their industry, but also from the public. They also deserve our thanks for making a strong commitment to the environment we all share.

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*John Cowan is the executive director of the Texas Association of Dairymen, Inc. ([www.milk4texas.org](http://www.milk4texas.org)).*

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