EU Sustainable Dairy: Combatting the Carbon Challenge

Friday 20 December, 2019

The Dairy Council for Northern Ireland has published the second annual EU Sustainable Dairy Fact Book, in conjunction with the EU and the European Milk Forum. This year's publication focuses on the Carbon Footprint of the Northern Ireland Dairy sector, and the proactive approach the sector is taking to lower emissions and mitigate against climate change.

Research indicates that the carbon footprint of dairy farms in Northern Ireland is appreciably lower than those of dairy farms in many other regions of Northwest Europe.

The DAIRYMAN INTERREG Project, a significant piece of work involving some 132 dairy farms across 10 regions of Northwest Europe, indicated that the average Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions on Northern Ireland dairy farms was the second lowest in the study, an indication of the significant achievement by Northern Ireland dairy farmers.

The fact book showcases the cutting edge research on carbon sequestration being carried out at the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) and shines a light on the investments and measures taken by local farmers to lower their carbon footprint by investing in renewable energy and making other efficiency measures.

The most recent statistics from DAERA show that total emissions (excluding sequestration) related to milk production decreased from a population average of 1,927 (CO2e/kg ECM) in 1990 to 1,272 (CO2e/kg ECM) in 2017. Whilst milk production in the dairy sector has expanded by 73% since 1990, the total number of dairy cows over this period has increased by only 14%, meaning this improvement in carbon footprint has been driven by substantial increases in milk yield per cow.

Dr Mike Johnston MBE, Chief Executive of the Dairy Council NI says the local dairy sector recognises the climate challenge, *"Over the past few years there has been increased public awareness about climate change and the actions that we, as a society, need to take to tackle those risks. The dairy sector recognises the urgent need to adapt and change our practices.*

"This publication celebrates the fantastic work already being done in this area. The important work at Agri-food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) develops the science behind the application of technology and management practices on farms that will reduce emissions, and demonstrates how these are being implemented on dairy farms throughout Northern Ireland.

"It also displays the investment by Northern Ireland dairy processors to reduce their emissions, and demonstrates the positive impact that innovation and effective management is having in reducing the dairy sector's carbon footprint."

Local farmers Hall Donnell from Ballymagorry, Strabane, and Hugh Harbison from Aghadowey, Coleraine are featured as case studies, showcasing on-farm efficiency measures implemented to lower carbon footprint, and sustain and protect the land for future generations.

Aghadowey farmer Hugh Harbison, whose farm provides a case study in the EU Sustainable Dairy Fact Book commented, *"My generation is much more environmentally aware. They want tasty food that has low food mileage and low carbon footprint."*

The fact book also features case studies on the work being carried out by local dairy companies to address their environmental impact, and an interview with Brian Lindsay, Development Director of the Dairy Sustainability Framework. World-renowned experts in the world of nutrition, Professor Adam Drewnowski and Professor Ian Givens, also discuss the important contribution of dairy foods to the Northern Ireland diet.

The 2019 fact book is available on the Dairy Council website at the following link:https://www.dairycouncil.co.uk/consumers/sustainable-dairy/fact-books/fact-book-2019

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