

Vt. Dairy Farmers Create New Program to Drive Profits

LISA RATHKE, Associated Press

SOUTH BURLINGTON, Vt. (AP) — Dairy farmers frustrated by what they saw as a lack of access to experts have helped to create a new Vermont program aimed at growing the state's milk supply by helping farmers better manage their operations.

DairyVision VT offers dairy farmers a management team to help make them more profitable.

"It stemmed from some frustration and what I thought would be an opportunity for other dairy farmers in this state," said Reg Chaput, a North Troy dairy farmer.

The idea behind it was to grow the production of commercial milk in Vermont by teaching farmers better, more efficient ways to farm, said Mark Rodgers, a West Glover dairy farmer who is vice chairman of DairyVision's executive committee. The focus is on increasing the milk supply in an environmentally and fiscally sound manner.

It's aimed at farms that might be moving from one generation to the next, or farms that might decide to merge, or farmers who want to shift crops or have labor issues.

"This was individual farmers who were frustrated with what they saw as access to the very best technical assistance in the Northeast," said program coordinator Louise Calderwood. The first four enrollees in the new program, including Chaput, were picked this month.

Farmers pay half the cost of an assessment — \$3,000 — and DairyVision pays the other half, from a combination of public and private funding, Calderwood said. Once the assessment is done by a team of experts, farmers would pay for any future work.

The team includes two veterinarians and experts in farm business, crops and human resources. Vermont has an array of technical support for farmers, Calderwood.

The difference with DairyVision is that it's focused on the farmers who produce milk that they sell to processors — commodity milk — rather than farmers who produce milk and turn it into value-added products, although the program could be used by those types of producers, as well, she said.

Chaput thinks it's a better tool for farmers to use when they seek financing from banks.

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"With this the way we've got it said up now the banker is going to be faced with four consultants who have been working together to bring this together to present it to the dairy operation and supports the financial investment," he said.

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