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INTRODUCTION TO DAIRY STEWARDSHIP ALLIANCE ON- FARM SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOLKIT

UNDERSTANDING THE TOOLKIT

When farms are operated in balance with the earth's natural systems such as air, water, energy and nutrients, nature's principles are applied to sustain a farm's natural resources. Sustainable dairy farming strives to protect and enhance the natural environment, Animal Husbandry, and local communities, while striving for profitability and providing a high quality of life for farmers and their families. This Toolkit contains ten Educational Modules, each of which covers a topic critical to sustainable dairy farming in Vermont. These ten modules focus on:



Animal Husbandry



Nutrient Management



Biodiversity



Organic



Community Health



Pest Management



Energy



Soil Health



Farm Financials



Water Management

THE DAIRY STEWARDSHIP ALLIANCE:

In 2003 Ben & Jerry's joined forces with the University of Vermont's Center for Sustainable Agriculture and the St. Albans Cooperative Creamery to launch the Dairy Stewardship Alliance. The Project's goals are:

- to provide an on-farm self-assessment tool designed to enable farmers to more efficiently assess the environmental, social and economic aspects of their farm operations;
- to provide information about sustainable dairy farming practices; and
- to provide a foundation for further development of programs that promote sustainability in agriculture.

As a first step, Ben & Jerry's engaged four graduate students from the Corporate Environmental Management Program at the University of Michigan's School of Natural Resources and Environment to develop a comprehensive set of sustainability indicators for dairy farming, along with a set of Educational Modules that farmers could use to self-assess their farm management practices and performance over time.

The project was officially launched in the winter of 2004 with a group of farmer-members of the St. Albans Coop; they volunteered to complete the assessment tool, which involved answering questions for several assessment modules and submitting the results for inclusion in a confidential database. Participating farmers received a personalized summary of the results for their farms, a comparison to other member farms' results, and information on how to improve results.

GOAL

The Dairy Stewardship Alliance strives to provide farmers the tools to understand, document and implement sustainable dairy farming practices. The information obtained from the farmers will be collected and analyzed in order to develop targeted programs specific to the need of the farming community. The intent of the project is to make the toolkit accessible to the entire Vermont farming community.



INSTRUCTIONS

For each of the following Education Modules, carefully read the introductions and background information. For all the assessment questions, choose the categories that best identify your current management practices. Use the summary sheet on the last page of each section to evaluate your practices. Once you have completed each section, use the Overall Summary of Results (Table 1) to track your current farm practices. Fill in completely both copies of the individual module summaries, as well as the overall summary. It is important to maintain a copy of the assessment results for your own records for use in the future. Use the Assessment Checklist to easily identify the completion of each of the steps of the toolkit. Return the completed sheet to the appropriate organization.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION DATA SHEET

The information provided by this data sheet is critical in ensuring accurate analysis of herd and farm information, as well as documenting accurate contact information of the farmer. Please completely fill out the form and send it along with the completed Assessment Module Toolkit Summary to the appropriate organization. If any of the information is not relevant to you or your farm please indicate so in the proper space or leave blank.

ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST

Place a check mark in each box after you have successfully completed each task. Please note that the individual assessments can be done in any order when time allows. Only after you have completed each individual assessment can the Overall Summary of Results be completed.

Assessment Task to be completed	Original Copy (to be sent to the appropriate organization.)	Duplicate Copy (for my records)
Animal Husbandry		
Biodiversity		
Community Health		
Energy		
Farm Financials		
Nutrient Management		
Pest Management		
Soil Health		
Water Management		
Overall Summary		
Data Sheet		



BACKGROUND INFORMATION DATA SHEET

Farm Name _____

Farmer's Name _____

Owner 1 _____

Owner 2 _____

Relationship to owner _____

Street 1 _____

Street 2 _____

City _____

County _____

State _____

Zip Code _____

Phone number _____

Email address/and web address of farm _____

Is your farm organic, in transition, or conventional? _____

Do you own or rent? _____

Circle the age range of the person completing the survey and all people involved

on the farm: (17-25) (26-35) (36-45) (46-55) (56-65) (65+)

How old is the farm itself? _____

How many milking and dry animals are on the farm? _____

How many young stock are on the farm? _____

What are the total pounds of milk produced on the farm? _____

What are the average pounds of milk per cow in a year? _____

What is the rolling herd average on the farm? In thousands of lbs. milk/yr/cow:

<7000 lbs. 7,000-12,000 lbs. 12,000-17,000 lbs. 17,000-22,000 lbs. >22,000 lbs.

What is the best way to contact you? (Email) (post mail) (telephone) (other)
(if other, please specify) _____

How many acres do you own/rent? _____

How many acres are cropped? _____

How many acres are pastured? _____



INTRODUCTION TO DAIRY FARM TOOLKIT

INTRODUCTION

This Toolkit is designed to provide the Vermont dairy farmer with information on how his or her current practices compare economically, socially and environmentally to best management practices. Additional resources are provided on how to improve upon these practices, if desired.

The Toolkit modules are designed to be reviewed one by one, and in no particular order. This way, you have the flexibility to focus on areas of interest as time permits. Each module focuses on either an economic, environmental, or social issue and contains the following parts:

- **Description.** Provides an explanation of the topic and its relevance to dairy farming. Any unusual terms that may be used are also clarified in this section.
- **Incentives for Change.** This section addresses the benefits you can expect by improving practices within each area. Such benefits may include cost savings, improved human health and environment, improved public image, and regulatory compliance.
- **Assessment Questions.** You will be asked to answer approximately five to ten questions regarding the topic area. The majority of questions are multiple-choice with the first possible answer a status quo base-line practice and the last possible answer a best practice. Each question or set of questions is followed by a brief discussion that provides an explanation of desirable practices and connections between the listed practices in relation to the indicator topic.
- **Linkages to Other Modules.** The topics in a given module are often linked to topics in other modules. This section outlines where related topics are covered in different modules. A chart displaying the linkages can also be seen below:

	Animal Husbandry	Biodiversity	Community Health	Energy	Farm Financials	Nutrient Management	Organic	Pest Management	Soil Health	Water Management
Animal Welfare	X	X			X	X	X		X	X
Biodiversity		X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X
Community Health			X		X		X	X		X
Energy				X	X	X	X			X
Farm Financials					X	X	X	X	X	X
Nutrient Management						X	X		X	X
Organic							X	X	X	X
Pest Management								X	X	X
Soil Health									X	X
Water Management										X



- **Further Information.** Further Information. After completing the Educational Modules, you may find that you would like to gain additional information on the subject. This section includes additional information including helpful websites, organizations, and other resources.
- **Summary of Results.** This section summarizes your responses and rates your overall performance according to a 'stop light' system. A "Green" score means that you are utilizing best practices; a "Yellow" score means that while some good practices are being used, there are some key areas that to improve upon; and a "Red" score means that you should carefully review your practices and make an effort to improve your practices in the topic area.

The goal of this program is to introduce farmers to best management practices as they relate to sustainable dairy farming. While many farmers may already be operating at a 'best practice' level, others may benefit from making changes to existing practices. The anticipation is that this program will be a continual work in progress and may run for numerous years, as change, especially on a farm, takes time, and as farmers find that they could improve their processes. The general process is anticipated as the following:

1. Evaluate your farms on a module-by-module basis, as time permits.
2. Meet with a representative from the Dairy Stewardship Alliance Team or other representative to review assessment results and discuss which areas are of top importance. Also, discuss alternative practices within the specific area of focus and any limitations or concerns that are specific to your farm.
3. Make modifications to farm practices with assistance from the representative and/or additional information sources.
4. Steps 2 - 5 should continue on an on-going basis, with periodic updates to the modules.

These steps and resulting changes in on-farm practices will help to transition the farm from existing practices to desirable practices oriented towards sustainable dairy farming. Gradual change is anticipated.



TOOLKIT SUMMARY RESULTS

FARM NAME OR FARM #: _____

After you have answered the questions and filled in the summary sheet for each educational module, record your results from each in the Table 1 below by placing a checkmark in the appropriate column. By recording how you performed for all of the modules on this page, you can easily identify the key topic areas to address.

Please note, the Organic Module provides guidance into what practices are required to be certified organic and does not contain Assessment Questions, hence the "N/A" as noted below.

TABLE 1: OVERALL SUMMARY OF RESULTS

	Green	Yellow	Red
1. Animal Husbandry			
2. Biodiversity			
3. Community Health			
4. Energy			
5. Farm Financials			
6. Nutrient Management			
7. Organic	N/A	N/A	N/A
8. Pest Management			
9. Soil Health			
10. Water Management			

Areas to Focus on Immediately (Red): _____

Areas to Focus on in Near Future (Yellow): _____



TOOLKIT SUMMARY RESULTS

FARM NAME OR FARM #: _____

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TABLE 1: OVERALL SUMMARY OF RESULTS

	Green	Yellow	Red
1. Animal Husbandry			
2. Biodiversity			
3. Community Health			
4. Energy			
5. Farm Financials			
6. Nutrient Management			
7. Organic	N/A	N/A	N/A
8. Pest Management			
9. Soil Health			
10. Water Management			

Areas to Focus on Immediately (Red): _____

Areas to Focus on in Near Future (Yellow): _____



