



FARM Environmental Stewardship

Results of the Conservation Practice Questionnaire Pilot Program

Pilot Summary

The Conservation Practice Questionnaire (CPQ) is an optional add-on questionnaire to the existing FARM Environmental Stewardship (ES) Version 2.0 evaluation. The existing FARM ES evaluation focuses on greenhouse gas emissions and energy use; the CPQ goes beyond these topics to ask about dairy farmers' field and dairy-level conservation practices to capture a more holistic sustainability story. The topics covered in the CPQ are of growing interest to customers and consumers. Additionally, the CPQ addresses topics covered in the industry's 2050 environmental stewardship goals.

Revisions or Actions given Pilot Feedback

- Provide additional clarity on certain questions and definitions as requested by pilot participants
- Emphasize that there is an "other" field for several questions which should be utilized when the given checkbox list does not include a given plan, program, or practice being used
- Adjust certain wording and multiple choice options based on the recommendations
- Develop informational resources about the technical assistance and cost-share opportunities available to producers for various practices

Held for Future Revisions

- Some pilot participants suggested adding questions about the contents of the written Nutrient Management Plan and details on manure handling practices. Given that the contents of the plan will vary based on the needs of the operation and the regulatory requirements, it is recommended to hold off on adding such questions in this version.
- One suggestion was to add a question to capture the length of time various practices have been in place. Given that practice implementation may vary based on the rotation and the goal of the CPQ to be a simple starting point, it is recommended to hold off on adding such questions in this version.
- One suggestion was to further breakout the NRCS programs / practices to add options not currently in the CPQ. Given the goal to keep the CPQ simple at this point and the large breadth of NRCS practice codes, it is recommended to instead emphasize that there is an "other" field for many questions. Inclusion of additional practices may be considered in future versions.

Pilot Findings – Producer Feedback

The pilot program launched in the winter of 2022 and ran through mid-March 2022. The goal of the pilot program was to test the CPQ with various dairies across the country. The most important part of the pilot is producer feedback. Producer feedback, along with feedback from FARM Participants, will be a key part of how FARM refines the questionnaire. The information and feedback will be kept anonymous and used only for the continued development of the questionnaire.

Participation

The following 9 organizations participated in the pilot:

- Agri-Mark, Inc.
- Associated Milk Producers, Inc.
- Glanbia
- Foremost Farms USA
- Maryland & Virginia Milk Producers Cooperative
- Michigan Milk Producers Association
- Northwest Dairy Association
- Sartori
- United Dairywomen of Arizona

They implemented the evaluation tool with a total of 31 dairy farms. This section describes the feedback received through the feedback forms.

Feedback Summary

Time to Complete (Minutes)	Ease of Completing the CPQ (1= Very Difficult; 5= Very Easy)	Comprehensiveness of Questionnaire (1= Very Lacking; 5 = Very Comprehensive)
19.4	4.3	4.3

Conservation Practice Questionnaire Feedback

Anything to add?

- Many producers thought the questionnaire was thorough and did not suggest additions
- Individual producer suggestions for additions included:
 - GPS for precision ag
 - Fuel-efficient equipment
 - Characterizing % of land that is highly erodible
 - Characterizing % of land owned versus rented
 - Characterizing % of cropland that is no-till / cover cropped
 - Topics that fall under a NMP: e.g. manure application method (incl injection), application records, timing of hauling
 - Cropping strategy: Interseeding into corn, double cropping
 - Crop selection: e.g. use of BT corn to reduce pesticide use or BMR corn vs conventional
 - Soil sampling: add an option for “at least once every 5 years”
 - Water stewardship: include “evapotranspiration” in the examples of relevant factors considered
- One producer suggested exploring further breaking down the various practices / technologies that would be covered under NRCS programs to capture beneficial work farms may be doing even if not participating in formal programs. While the questionnaire breaks out field-level practices and a few dairy-level practices, there are individual NRCS EQIP and other program practices not explicitly called out.

Anything need more clarity?

- Overall, producers felt there was clear direction, guidelines and that the notes fields were helpful
- Individual producer suggestions for clarification included:
 - Clearer definitions of pollinator habitat, beneficial insect habitat, field borders, and endangered species habitat
 - Clarify if pest control questions include weeds, animals, insects, or all three
 - Clarify definition of bedding byproducts. For example, would corn stalks as bedding be included?
 - Clarify if recreational use includes community bike trails
 - Clarify what practices constitute recycling water (e.g. does wash water that goes into the pit and is later therefore land applied covered?)
 - Clarification around the definition of energy efficient non-LED lights and energy efficient ventilation; listed examples could be beneficial

Anything to remove?

- There were no suggestions on questions to remove

Resource suggestions

- Resources for how to become involved / secure cost-share for practices mentioned, like pollinator habitat, prairie strips, etc.

General Feedback

- Several producers had positive feedback to share:
 - “No suggestions, happy with current efforts”
 - “It was nice and easy to do”
 - “Most questions are clear.”
 - “The "more information" boxes were very helpful in providing clarification to the questions.”
- One producer noted the questionnaire was too intrusive but did not provide further details
- It was noted that some farms have constraints on their options for practice implementation because of regulation or tradeoffs with other practices
- One producer commented that regenerative agriculture is the future and emphasized the importance of dairy’s sustainability story
- One producer noted that it was important to have a trained evaluator with them during the questionnaire as a resource. Otherwise, would need even more clarity around directions and guidelines for responding.
- One producer noted the importance of showcasing the value of cows as recyclers, e.g. through byproducts in feed
- One producer offered that it would be helpful to have more leadership from government agencies and private industry, as it seems that farmers are often tasked with leading efforts to attain sustainability

Pilot Findings – FARM Participant Feedback

FARM Participants implemented the pilot with producers. A meeting was held on March 22nd, 2022 to discuss the feedback and recommendations from those Participants (dairy cooperative and processor

representatives). The pilot Participants recommended moving forward with the governance process and presenting the questionnaire for Task Force review + approval.

Participant Feedback

- Participants reviewed the farmer feedback during the call and offered the following thoughts:
 - Participants expressed caution against too many additions as one of the goals is for the CPQ to be short and easy
 - Participants cautioned that there was a limit to the number of NRCS program practices we could ask about given how numerous the practice codes are. They suggested emphasizing that there is an “other” field to capture additional practices.
- Participants offered the following specific suggestions for topics to consider adding:
 - Forest land and forest management plans
 - Length of time producers have been implementing certain practices (e.g. no-till, cover crop)
- One Participant representative suggested that a producer may have information about field production practices, even if they are not involved in the management.
- Participants noted that adding questions about the practices covered under a NMP would feel duplicative with the current FARM ES evaluation, which asks about the use of written NMPs
 - If additional questions are added, they suggested putting them with the existing NMP question rather than in the CPQ
 - One suggestion was a checkbox of topics that the NMP addresses

Evaluator Feedback

On-farm evaluators were asked for feedback on the process of implementing the CPQ. The following comments were captured:

- Overall, the process went well and CPQ data was easy to collect
- Most evaluators had producers fill out the CPQ in conjunction with FARM ES. In some cases, the current FARM ES evaluation helped to provide more context to the CPQ
- Evaluators felt there could be more clarification in the CPQ, while acknowledging there is a fine line before getting too detailed
- There was a recommendation for more clarity on various definitions and examples in the CPQ. For instance:
 - What’s covered in recycled bedding (saw dust, shavings)
 - What’s covered in recycling inorganic materials (household or ag plastic)
 - Full list of feeds considered byproducts

Resource Needs

- Evaluators vary in their areas of expertise and some of the CPQ topics may not be in an individual’s realm of expertise. Training and resources will be helpful.
- There was a request for additional information on various field level practices as well as cost share or funding opportunity information.