

California Department of Food and Agriculture
2026 Dairy Plus Program
Frequently Asked Questions

General Questions

1. Are Financial documents required to be submitted as part of the application?

No. Financial documents are a requirement associated with the CDFA Alternative Manure Management Program (AMMP) and Dairy Digester Research and Development Program (DDRDP). For the 2026 Dairy Plus Program, there is no concurrent AMMP or DDRDP funding available, and applicants will not need to submit financial documents.

2. If a dairy receives a grant from a private organization (non-government), are they ineligible?

As long as the main recipient of the Dairy Plus Program funds is the dairy producer, the sources for other matching funds towards the project are not restricted.

3. A producer has a current AMMP or DDRDP project that is likely to be done during the application review process period – would their operation be eligible to receive Dairy Plus Program funding if the AMMP or DDRDP project is complete before the Dairy Plus Program funding decisions are made?

Yes, a previous or current/in-progress AMMP (or DDRDP) recipient, as well as applicants that have implemented or are currently implementing an approved AMMP- or DDRDP-like practice seeking to enhance manure and nutrient management of their facilities, can apply for funding through the Dairy Plus Program.

4. Does a dairy's financial strength significantly affect whether or not they are selected for the Dairy Plus Program grants? In other words, are dairies with negative amounts on their tax returns less likely to be awarded for the Dairy Plus Program grants?

A financial review is not included in the scoring criteria for the Dairy Plus Program. Nevertheless, applicants should evaluate their operation's financial stability and their ability to cover upfront costs while awaiting reimbursement. They should also consider whether they can sustain the project during and after the grant period.

5. If a farm with a covered lagoon digester (not CDFA DDRDP-funded) wants to apply for a Dairy Plus Program grant to treat their digestate, are they eligible?

Yes, a previous or current/in-progress AMMP (or DDRDP) recipient, as well as applicants that have implemented or are currently implementing an approved AMMP- or DDRDP-like practice seeking to enhance manure and nutrient management of their facilities, can apply for funding through the Dairy Plus Program. While the Dairy Plus Program cannot fund anaerobic digesters, biogas cleanup equipment, biogas upgrading

equipment, pipelines, and/or electricity, post-anaerobic digestion practices or technologies for treating the digestate material that exits the dairy digester are eligible.

6. Do permits required for the project need to be approved before we send in the Dairy Plus Program grant application?

No, the Dairy Plus Program permits do not need to be approved or be on hand at the time of application. However, project readiness is a factor in review, and applicants should be able to demonstrate an understanding of what permits are needed and the process that will be required. If awarded, the applicant should be prepared to have all relevant permits in hand before starting an approved Dairy Plus Program (DPP) project.

7. Two dairies are adjacent and can share a vermifiltration system. One of the dairies will apply, but the system will serve the 2 dairies under the same FSA. In our mind, it will result in a larger project with more animals treated than only having one dairy. Is this allowed? Should we submit the FSAs of both dairies?

Yes, it is allowed for one dairy to apply for funding for a shared vermifiltration system that serves both adjacent dairies under the same FSA. This approach can indeed create a larger project that benefits more animals by efficiently managing manure from both dairies. When applying, the applicant should include the FSA forms for both dairies, which possibly should show the same information. Applicants should be sure to provide detailed information on how the system will function and the benefits it will bring to both dairies in their application. Additionally, applicants should include the animal count of those animals being treated by the shared advanced manure management system in the appropriate Benefits Calculator Tool.

8. Two dairies are adjacent and can share a vermifiltration system. One of the dairies will apply, but the system will serve 2 dairies under two different FSA registrations. Is this allowed? Should we submit the FSAs of both dairies?

Yes, two dairy farms under two different FSAs are allowed to share a vermifiltration/advanced manure management system. Currently, there is no need to send the FSA form of the dairy that sends the manure to the dairy where the vermifiltration is located. Only the FSA form of the dairy where the vermifiltration is located needs to be included in the application, as this is the site where the environmental performance review will be conducted. However, this may change if CDFA/CDRF receives different guidance from USDA after the project award.

Technical Questions

1. Can a weeping wall be the primary separator required for vermifiltration, or does it require an additional mechanical separator?

Yes, new to this round of the Dairy Plus Program, a weeping wall can act as the primary solid-liquid separator for vermifiltration and/or advanced solid-liquid separation aided by flocculants and/or bead filters.

Budget, Matching Funds, and Allowable/Unallowable Cost Questions

1. Can USDA EQIP funds be used as a Dairy Plus Program match?

Yes, EQIP can be matching funds for the Dairy Plus Program. However, it is not possible for applicants to receive EQIP funds for the same practice and at the same time as the practice funded by the Dairy Plus Program. This is because both programs are funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).

2. Can matching funds be spent before the start of the project to increase project readiness?

Matching funds spent prior to the grant term and project implementation cannot be able to be counted as matching funds. It would be strongly encouraged to wait until an agreement is executed and the grant term begins to start spending matching funds, so that they can be accounted for. This differs from costs that may be incurred to contribute to a project's readiness, such as fees for permit submission or design development. Costs that are incurred outside of the grant agreement term cannot be reimbursed.

3. Can we show proof of matching funds from the bank during application, and then if other funds are secured, can they be substituted once a project is awarded?

Yes, as long as in the application a source of matching funds is clearly demonstrated to the reviewers, these can be solidified at a later time. We may need the awardee to provide updated documentation or evidence of the matching funds if they are different from what was shown in the application.

4. What would be considered documented evidence of matching funds with the Dairy Plus Program? Especially if an applicant doesn't know if they have secured other federal funds yet - how would they document this?

Dairy Plus Program applicants may be applying for multiple grants at the same time, such as obtaining matching funds for their Dairy Plus Program project. If a matching fund source is not fully secure at the time of application, it is recommended that the applicant identify more than one matching fund source in case the primary matching fund source falls through. Examples of documentation might include bank loan agreements or financial institution support for a project, or letters from other companies or organizations that might want to help fund the project, and how much they will contribute.

5. Is it possible to start working on a proposed system with activities/costs not included in the project budget? If so, are there any limitations in these pre-project activities? Are there specific activities (still necessary for the implementation of the project but not included in the budget worksheet) that are not allowed? For example, can they include construction, supplies, equipment, and labor?

Applicants can begin pre-development activities such as those that may increase project readiness (for example, submitting permit applications, obtaining design or engineering documents). If occurring prior to or at the time of application, those items would generally not be included in the proposal's Budget Worksheet. It's important to note that CDFA and USDA are unable to reimburse expenses incurred outside the designated grant agreement term, including costs that arise before the application is submitted or during the review process.

While there is no defined guidance on what types of pre-project activities are allowed, some additional considerations include: applicants are highly encouraged to refrain from beginning any "ground-breaking" activities before receiving approval for the project plan and design through the USDA NRCS environmental evaluation (CPA-52) process. Additionally, if pre-project/pre-development activities include major components of manure management being captured by the Benefits Calculator Tool but are occurring prior to the project term, for example, primary mechanical separation, they may not be accepted as part of the total project's GHG reductions.

6. The Dairy Plus Program refers to \$750/cow – does this include dry cows and heifers on a dairy facility?

Yes, all types of cows on a dairy (with the exception of calves) can be counted as a "cow" in Dairy Plus if their manure will be affected by the project, as they can be quantified in the AMMP or DDRDP Benefits Calculator Tools (lactating dairy cows in both freestall and open lot corrals, dry cows, and heifers are included livestock categories in both calculators).