



CDQAP Quality Assurance Update - February 2022

Be on the Lookout

Tricolored Blackbird Season Update

Nesting season for the threatened tricolored blackbird is about 60 days, starting as early as February. As wetlands have continued to disappear, dairy forage fields have become a favorite nesting place for the species. Typically, large colonies of these birds will make their nests on a dozen or so dairies across the Central Valley. By allowing the birds to safely nest in fields, dairy farmers have been helping the birds to reproduce and thrive.



The annual phenomenon can be a real challenge for dairy farmers because the birds' nesting in forage fields coincides with harvesting season, forcing the delay or cancellation of harvests. Since 2015—through partnership with dairy and conservation groups—Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has provided funding to help dairy farmers recoup some of their financial losses caused by delaying or forgoing harvest.

Record Number of Birds Nesting on Dairies

In 2021, more than 170,000 adult tricolored blackbirds were protected on 11 dairy farms across four counties (Kern, Fresno, Tulare, and Merced). Similarly, the 2020 season saw an estimated total of 177,000 adult birds. Both the 2020 and 2021 seasons represent

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Producer Survey Mailed: Please Return!

Help us help you. Dairy producers should receive a survey this week on the Alternative Manure Management Program (AMMP). More AMMP funds will be available in 2022, and additional funding is anticipated for future years. Information gathered in the survey will be provided to CDFA to help improve future program delivery. Participation is voluntary and your information will remain confidential.



Don't Forget the Water

By Deanne Meyer, Ph.D., Livestock Waste Management Specialist, UC Davis, Department of Animal Science, UC ANR

So far, 2022 is DRY. In addition to other things, that means the nutrients in your lagoon may be more concentrated. Be sure to add fresh water as you apply liquid manure so nutrients are applied at appropriate rates. Keep in mind, if crop yields are off at harvest, you'll want to check crop nitrate concentrations and talk with your nutritionist.



Work with your certified crop adviser (CCA) so your Nutrient Budgets are up-to-date for your current cropping pattern. This is very important! When Regional Water Quality Control Board staff are out doing inspections they, focus on budgets and manure applications to fields.

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Golden State Dairy Management Conference: March 23 in Modesto

The University of California Golden State Dairy Management conference will take place on **Wednesday, March 23 at the Stanislaus County Ag Center.** [Learn more and register today.](#)



California Dairy Sustainability Summit: April 12-14, 2022

The next virtual California Dairy Sustainability Summit will take place online on April 12-14. Registration for dairy farmers is \$25 and is now open. Talk to your trade organization or field representative about potential opportunities for complimentary registration. **Speakers include top-level executives from Starbucks, Nestlé, and California Dairies, Inc., among dairy farmers, industry leaders, government officials, researchers, technology providers, and other experts.** Check out the growing speaker roster and register at cadairysummit.com.



Every Point Counts: Attention to Details Important on AMMP Applications

By Deanne Meyer (UC Davis), and Randi Black, Betsy Karle, and Jennifer Heguy (UC Cooperative Extension)

It's that time when CDFA opens a brief period for accepting AMMP applications. Scan the QR code or visit the CDFA [webpage](#) for more information about applying.



If you're applying you'll want to be sure you cross your t's and dot your i's. The application requires detailed information to compete with other projects and be successful. In 2020, 11 of 79 projects received funding. The focus of AMMP is to fund approved practices believed to reduce volatile solids loading to manure lagoons and therefore reduce methane (greenhouse gas) emissions.

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Don't Forget the Water *continued*

Modify manure applications. Evaluate your Nutrient Budgets to identify if you should modify manure applications. Modify manure applications as needed based on estimated change in crop N uptake/removal, nitrate concentration in groundwater and fallow land. If winter crop production is off, you need to restrict nutrient applications to be sure your nitrogen applied to/removal ratio is okay.

Modify Your Nutrient Budget (Get a CCA Signature). If you change which crops you grow (including fallowing land) for your summer crop, you will need to modify your Nutrient Budget. Given the water situation, more producers are talking about sorghum instead of corn. If you're thinking about changing your summer crop, talk with your CCA and nutritionist.

Current Budgets are necessary. They make Regional Water Board inspections run smoother. Inspectors are looking very closely at Nutrient Budgets when they inspect dairies. What crop should be in the ground? When was it planted? What is the expected date for harvest? How much nitrogen has been applied? Previous violation notices to dairy operators who applied manure without a growing crop have included the need to remove the manure from the field and potential fines. Almost all Central Valley dairies are also in the representative groundwater monitoring program. To remain in the program, nutrient application must be consistent with Budgets.

Tricolored Blackbirds *continued*

a record-high number of tricolored blackbirds being protected on dairy farms. When the conservation partnership began in 2015, only 67,000 tricolors were found on dairies.

The last time a statewide survey was conducted to assess the entire population was in 2017, when 178,000 adult birds were counted. An updated statewide survey of tricolored blackbirds is expected in early 2022, which will hopefully document an increase in population, due in no small part to dairy fields and the strong collaboration between dairy farmers, conservationists, and NRCS.

Drought conditions will continue to pose challenges to tricolored blackbirds and farmers, making ongoing partnership essential. Partners include Audubon California, California Dairy Research Foundation, California Farm Bureau Federation, Dairy Cares, California Dairy Campaign, Milk Producers Council, and Western United Dairies. These groups provide coordinated outreach support, research, and partial matching funds. Research efforts continue to explore ways to draw the birds to other more suitable habitats or otherwise minimize financial losses to dairy farms.

Think You Might Have the Birds?

Since the species is listed as threatened, it is unlawful to harm or harass tricolored blackbirds. The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) staff and others are out once again looking for areas where the birds might be nesting. Identifying features include a red shoulder patch and bright white bar. If you believe you might have tricolors nesting your forage fields, you can contact NRCS to have their biologist provide a confidential assessment and to learn how you can enroll in the payment program. Biologist, Jesse Bahm can be reached at jesse.bahm@ca.usda.gov or (559) 490-5124. You can also contact your trade association or cooperative field representative with questions.



AMMP Applications *continued*

Each submission requires attention to detail! All seven sections of the application need to be filled in completely. Any blank or incomplete answers take away points from your project total. You need every point possible to be competitive.

You may complete the application yourself or choose to work with either a technical service provider or UC ANR Climate Smart Agriculture Community Education Specialist. Most producers appreciate the chance to work with a consultant to be sure the application is completed and no answers are left blank. (It's possible to include allowable consultant costs in the budget!) Projects should be shovel ready (all required permits in place at time of application). Properly entering information in the calculator spreadsheet is essential. Lining up financing and factoring in inflation are both important in this process. Remember, the application is likely due at end of March and projects won't start until late in the 4th quarter of this year or early next year.

Information is available to help you better understand some of the management implications of different project types. Factsheets, producer interviews, and webinars related to use of vacuums, mechanical separators, and compost bedded pack barns. Visit the [CDQAP webpage](#) or scan the QR code to find these useful materials. Good luck with your applications!

