

Who controls your data? ADC Survey Results

ADC Survey collected anonymous responses from ADC dairy farmer members and farmers receiving our newsletter. Responses came from dairy farms located mainly in the Upper Midwest (70% from Wisconsin) and Northeast / Mid-Atlantic region (Pennsylvania, New York, Maryland, and Virginia).

The results are as follows:

- 72% have been asked to provide detailed farm data
- 77% report the request is not voluntary “in practice”
- 25% described it as “strongly encouraged”
- 32% said they were told “everyone must do it to sell milk”
- 20% felt threatened with penalties or loss of contract
- 87% said they did not sign a data-sharing agreement and 13% were unsure
- 80% said they do not trust their data is secure
- 92% received no compensation for providing this data
- 36% believe they have already undergone sustainability audits and 15% were unsure
- 100% agreed: *Farmers should own and control their farm data.*
- 85% replied ‘yes’ to this question: *Should USDA or Congress require transparency, limits, and fair compensation when farmer data is collected?*

Dairy farmers had opportunities to comment within the anonymous survey, and some chose to provide responses through ADC’s confidential intake line. Many took the opportunity to offer comments or pose additional questions. Below are some common themes:

“It’s okay to aggregate my information with others, but someone will have my farm’s business data on their computer and may do something with this data without my consent.”

“How will this be used against me in the future?”

Who will really control my farm business?

Pre-competitive collaboration by milk buyers is how this came about.

What does this do to competition within the dairy industry and to U.S. national security and food security?

This appears to be a back door to regulating agriculture without representation or due process.

Will carbon or methane baselines become mandatory compliance through production quotas or ongoing “corrective action” or compliance concerns?

Additional direct thoughts and questions raised by survey respondents and calls to the confidential intake line:

1) Once they have my data and calculate a baseline for my farm, they will come back the next year and regulate me here and there and everywhere.

2) Do we even know if they have the right concept of how to measure methane from cattle?

3) What process or leverage do I have to protect my farm from corrective action to reduce emissions they calculate from my information?

4) The data could be used against my farm in the future. What protection do I have for how they process my data?

5) *“Any pushback will be met with punishment.”*

6) What if the third-party collecting the data for my milk buyer is a competitor of a company or coop I do business with?

7) If the U.S. government doesn’t recognize this, who do I go to for representation if there’s a problem?

8) They say it is voluntary, so when did farmers give their consent?

9) We have become the low-cost cheese and butter seller on global markets, by a lot, so how is this helping?

10) If the U.S. is negotiating trade agreements, can’t U.S. ag commodities be exempted from the extreme EU climate rules?

11) Will this affect anti-competitive market conditions for selling milk and buying inputs or even getting access to credit?

12) What about the security of our farms and our food supply? We’re providing sensitive information and we don’t know where it is going or who is seeing it or what can be done with it.