

Dairy farms are using too much water

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Credit: Heriot-Watt University

Dr. David Campbell, associate professor of water conservation at Heriot-Watt University, said: "The UK uses around 40.9 billion litres of water each year to produce 14 billion litres of milk. There is certainly room for improvement and what I would like to do is meet with representatives from the dairy industry and see what we can do to cut down water use.

"Water is used for drinking, cleaning and cooling in the [dairy](#) sector. The

ever-increasing cost of water, more stringent regulatory regimes and the high cost of energy for pumping and processing milk means dairy producers will benefit from optimal use of water.

"By improving water use efficiency, water and wastewater bills could be reduced by 30 per cent, which is a further incentive to dairy producers, alongside improving the sector's overall sustainability credentials.

"This isn't about introducing new regulation or burdensome tasks – it's about saving money for these producers and increasing sustainability. We can tell from data that some producers already use [water conservation measures](#), and those who use the highest amounts of water might simply be unaware that they are at the upper end of the chart. At the moment, there's no way for them to know."

Dr. Campbell's study established upper and lower water limits for liquid milk, butter and cheese producers using five years of data.

Companies with water use below lower limits were considered to perform 'excellently,' those using water within lower and upper limits were considered to perform 'averagely,' while water use above the upper limits was considered 'poor.'

When comparing 27 liquid milk producers, the study found that only three sites used water "excellently," and seven "poorly."

The UK's cheese makers were the least average of the dairy sector; only three sites used water "averagely." Only one site used water above the lower benchmark, described as an impressive performance by Dr. Campbell, and a sign that [water conservation](#) schemes were already in place.

Dr. Campbell added: "The aim of every benchmarking process is to

improve performance through comparison of one company's performance against those of high-performing, comparable organisations.

"Over 60 per cent of producers we studied use water inefficiently, which could be traced to outdated or inappropriate systems Version: 1 and processes, and the absence of any periodic benchmarking of performance.

"There is great potential for water use improvements on these sites, and it is our hope that the dairy sector will adopt more [water](#) efficient systems and conduct annual benchmarking exercises. Both dairy farmers and the UK's natural resource pool stand to benefit."

Provided by Heriot-Watt University

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