Increasingly, consumers want assurance the food they purchase is raised using environmentally responsible, sustainable practices. Industry research has shown that 42% of consumers are willing to pay more for products that are certified according to standards—from farm to table.

Dairy farmers in Wisconsin are responding. On Aug. 16, 2016, the Dairy Strong Alliance announced the formation of the “Dairy Strong Sustainability Alliance” at a news conference on the farm of Jeff Endres, in Waunakee, WI. Goals of the Alliance include:

- Fostering environmental, economic, and social stewardship
- Ensuring long-term viability of dairy farms and related businesses
- Show science-based outcomes
- Proactively align with company/customer demands

The Endres farm was chosen for the announcement because Jeff Endres is the chairperson for Yahara Pride Farms in southern Wisconsin. In 2012, this volunteer farmer cooperative began meeting to share information and strategies to improve land stewardship. More than 45 farms in the Yahara watershed participate in this voluntary, non-governmental certification program. In 2015, farmers in the program reduced phosphorus delivery to the Yahara River and its connected lakes by 8,642 lb. Since 2012, farmers have documented a total phosphorus delivery reduction of 15,872 lb. Phosphorus is linked to algae growth and water quality issues.

Yahara Pride’s use of CCAs, scientific documentation, and on-site evaluation was key to this success. And, their use of CCAs to improve farming practices serves as a blueprint to farmers across the country.

“CCAs bring the commitment, education, expertise, and experience to make a difference,” says Luther Smith, director of professional development and business relations for the American Society of Agronomy (ASA), which provides oversight for the CCA program. Smith first proposed the use of CCAs in the creation of sustainability programs at a June meeting of agricultural professionals.

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