

OUTSTANDING DAIRY PROCESSING & MANUFACTURING SUSTAINABILITY

Hilmar Cheese Company

Hilmar, California



Responsible water use and reclamation showcased by cheesemaker

At Hilmar Cheese Company's facilities in Hilmar, California, and Dalhart, Texas, water conservation is part of the cheesemaking process. The company makes cheese for brands distributed throughout the world, but it's not satisfied simply to help feed the planet. It wants to help preserve it, too.

That's no small task because the company makes about 2 million pounds of cheese each day. This requires a lot of milk, and about 87 percent of milk is water. With the help of new technologies, the facility is able to recover almost 100 percent of water from incoming milk. Then, water is treated and used up to three times for processes such as crop irrigation and landscaping.

Water reclamation is just one part of a comprehensive sustainability effort at Hilmar Cheese Company. Its new headquarters and innovation center was the first dairy building in the United States to receive LEED Platinum® certification, a standard established by the U.S. Green Building Council for environmentally sound design and construction. Inside this breakthrough building, you'll find use of solar energy, natural and occupancy lighting, and recycling efforts for everyday items such as office paper and computer equipment.

Anyone can see firsthand how cheese is made at Hilmar Cheese Company, thanks to its California visitor center, which attracts tens of thousands of people each year. In fact, visitor interest in the environment has prompted the company to issue an annual sustainability report on its website. Daily tours of hundreds of schoolchildren expose new generations to dairy's role in a sustainable food cycle.

"The owners are very passionate about connecting with the next generation as well as our current consumers," says Denise Skidmore, director of education and public relations for the 12 farm families who founded the company 31 years ago. "We want kids to know we make a product that's good for them, and we do it in a sustainable way."

The Hilmar LEED Platinum® headquarters features:

- A heating, ventilation and air conditioning system with a closed-loop water cooling process using one of the food processing water reclamation ponds
- A building design maximizing use of natural lighting
- Solar panels providing 25 percent of overall building energy demand