



For Collaborators: Frequently Asked Questions

Building Confidence in the Integrated System

It all starts at the farm, and you are an important piece in the engine that powers U.S. genetic evaluations.

Your direct work with producers, the collection of quality data and samples, and the transfer of standardized data is integral to the continued growth and success of the U.S. genetic system.

To strengthen the National Cooperator Database, it's important to address common questions from herd owners and managers. This resource equips you with clear, confident answers to support those conversations and highlight the importance of contributing data for genetic gains.

What is the “integrated system?”

The “integrated system” is a voluntary collaboration that starts on U.S. dairy farms and involves 60-plus cooperating organizations (including yours). Together, large volumes of data on individual dairy cows – millions of records each year – are entered into the National Cooperator Database that fuels dairy cow improvement.

What is the National Cooperator Database?

The National Cooperator Database is the engine that helps breed better cows. It is the data source for the U.S genetic evaluations and national benchmarks produced by the Council on Dairy Cattle Breeding (CDCB) as an independent, objective third party. The National Cooperator Database is the world's largest database of animal genetic (genotypic) and performance (phenotypic) data. In 2024, the 100 millionth animal linked to performance data was recorded in the database. More than 11 million genotypes have been added since genomic evaluations were introduced in 2009.

How many herds are represented in the national database?

In 2024, 10,000 U.S. dairy herds contributed information to the National Cooperator Database, thanks to the farm owners and managers who opted in to share phenotypic data on individual cows. Herds represent diverse management styles, facilities, sizes, breeds, and regions.

What's the benefit of sharing my herd data?

Every herd benefits from reliable genetic evaluations – for sire or female selection – and new selection traits that lead to better cows. However, herds that share data also receive outputs back to make more informed animal management decisions, discounts on genomic testing, and higher reliability of predictions for genetics used on the farm. The entire dairy industry can make more – and accelerated – improvement through reliable genetic evaluations, data-driven decision tools, and independent research that adds value to dairy herds.

What type of records are stored in the database?

Phenotypic data includes lactation (yield, components, somatic cell count), health, calving, milking speed, and reproduction records from farm and partner recorded insight and conformation scores from breed association classification. For all animals submitted for genomic evaluations, their genotypes are automatically recorded. All the individual animal data points – both phenotypic and genotypic – are tied together through unique animal identification and pedigree information.

Whatever the source, all data and organizations moving data into the National Cooperator Database must pass a robust quality certification process.





How does the data get from my farm into genetic evaluations?

After herd owners agree to share their data, it moves from the farm through the integrated system into the national database housed at CDCB. The 60-plus collaborators specialize in collecting and submitting accurate data, analyzing milk and DNA samples, providing quality checks and standardization of records, evaluating cow conformation, and requesting genomic results.

This data from herds across the U.S. is aggregated and anonymized in the National Cooperator Database. Then, CDCB calculates genetic evaluations for 50 individual traits and 4 selection indexes – Lifetime Net Merit \$, Cheese Merit \$, Fluid Merit \$, and Grazing Merit \$. CDCB produces these U.S. breeding values for six dairy breeds and dairy crossbreds.

The tremendous volume of data, combined with robust quality certification, results in increasingly reliable genetic evaluations that are recognized as the global standard.

How do I know when genetic evaluations are derived from this system?



The "Powered by CDCB" mark indicates that the genetic evaluations are generated from producer-owned data in the National Cooperator Database. With this mark, introduced in 2024, dairy farmers and breeders can be confident the genetic information comes from an objective, independent, and pre-competitive source.

What is the value of "processed data" for herd management?

There's an extra layer of data certification for herds that share their information with the National Cooperator Database. Herds benefit when their records go through Dairy Records Processing Centers (DRPCs) into the aggregated national database. Owners and managers that process cow records have more accurate, complete data and better dairy decision tools, while contributing to genetic evaluations and improvement.

Is my data secure and private?

Strict data confidentiality standards protect the privacy of individual farms. All data is aggregated into the National Cooperator Database, with codes that protect identifying information. Data control methods ensure that published results do not reveal identifiable information about individual farms (with the exception of animal ownership), thereby maintaining confidentiality and data integrity.

How is my data used? Who has access to it?

Herd and animal data is integrated into the National Cooperator Database after standardization at Dairy Records Processing Centers (DRPCs), breed associations, and genomic nominators. CDCB utilizes this dataset to publish U.S. dairy genetic evaluations and national benchmarks. Data is also available to researchers at CDCB and approved research institutions for specific projects. **No access to third parties is allowed unless authorized by the farm owner and data is never sold by CDCB.**

How do I know if my data is going into the National Cooperator Database?

For herds using Dairy Herd Information (DHI) services, check data-sharing permissions with the DHI affiliate or service organization that collects milk samples and data on the farm. Herds that process records can also ask the Dairy Records Processing Center (DPRC) if data is making it through quality control steps and into the National Cooperator Database. A new platform, Herd Portal, is being developed as an easier way for producers to direct how and with whom their DHI records are shared. The Herd Portal will be managed by the National Dairy Herd Information Association (NDHIA).

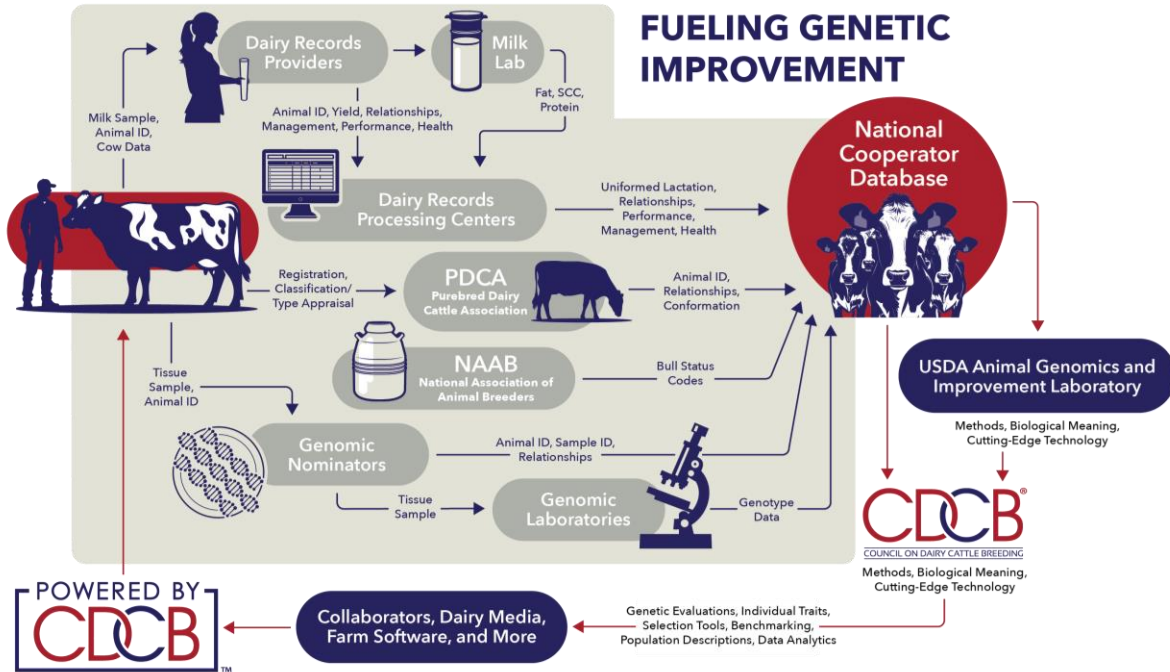
When animals are genotyped and nominated for genomic evaluations, all submitted animal data and genotype lab results are automatically integrated into the database. Farms that genomic test animals and share their herd data with the National Cooperator Database receive a fee credit on genomic testing.



How do all the parts fit together?

The diagram shows how the integrated system works.

NATIONAL COOPERATOR DATABASE



Dairy Records Providers collect on-farm data and milk samples through field service, working with certified milk labs for sample analysis. Often farmer-owned and regional, they unite through the Dairy Herd Information (DHI) system for national issues and quality standards.

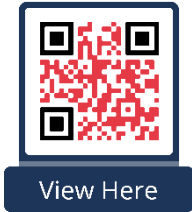
Dairy Records Processing Centers centralize and specialize in data processing and herd management insight. They deliver data back to farms and industry sectors and transfer standardized data into the National Cooperator Database for genetic evaluations and research.

Purebred Dairy Cattle Association represents the U.S. breed registry associations that deliver animal identification, ancestry documentation, and classification data for the integrated system.

National Association of Animal Breeders manages the bull status codes for artificial insemination (A.I.) and marketing of U.S. genetics.

Genomic Nominators and Laboratories manage the DNA samples and lab results alongside animal identification information that transfers into the National Cooperator Database and delivers genomic evaluations back to animal owners.

Questions about the National Cooperator Database or the campaign to increase data submissions?
 Contact CDCB Industry Relations Manager Katie Schmitt:
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Follow the QR code to learn more

