

Fond du Lac Dairy Survey - Results (From Dairy Frontiers - November 2007)

Paul Dyk, Dairy and Livestock Agent, Fond du Lac County (paul.dyk@ces.uwex.edu)

Who are the dairy producers in Fond du Lac and what do they think?

This is the purpose of the survey that I completed this past summer. Part of UW Extension's purpose is to plan programming based on the needs of the clients. For my position, the primary clients are the dairy producers of Fond du Lac County. All 395 dairy producers with a milk permit were given (by mail or hand delivery) a survey to complete. There were 146 of these surveys returned (37%); this is excellent for a survey of this type. Thanks to all.

Based on a previous informal survey, I know that about 58% of the cows in FDL are in 60 herds over 150 cows. The other 42% of the cows are in 336 herds under 150 cows. These two groups often have quite different facilities, management styles, goals, and possibly different perspectives on the industry. To capture these differences, I split my survey results into herds over and under 150 cows. There were 34 herds that responded to the survey over 150 cows and 109 herds under 150 cows (3 herds did not give herd size).

So what were the results?

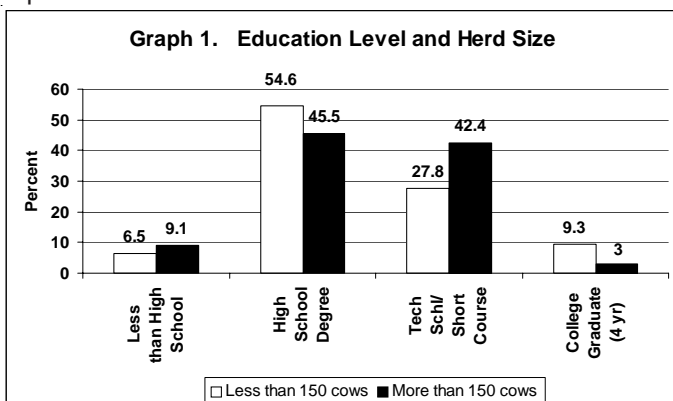
In Table 1 we can see who responded to the survey, mostly experienced (ok – older) men that have been in farming a long

Table 1. Demographics

Age	50.1
Number of Years Farming	29.4
Gender	
Female	2.8%
Male	97.2%

time. Many surveys came back with producers answering the question "How long have you been farming?" with a written answer, "All my life."

When looking at the education levels (Graph 1), more than 35% said they had educational training beyond high school. Both large and small farms had less than 10% of the producers with less education than a high school diploma.



What about the future? Table 3 shows that 60% of producers on smaller farms intend to continue farming for more than 10 years. However, the interesting question is

	Less than 150 cows	More than 150 cows
Less than 5 years	11.8%	0.0%
5-10 years	26.5%	18.2%
More than 10 years	61.8%	81.8%

what will happen to the other 40%? One question that I asked (Table 4), tried to understand what will happen when these producers stop/retire from farming. For

	Less than 150 cows	More than 150 cows
Child	29.5%	44.4%
Other relative/partner	3.6%	8.3%
No one, farm will likely stop producing milk	17.9%	0.0%
Not sure, farm will likely continue producing milk	18.8%	38.9%
Not sure, farm will likely stop producing milk	30.4%	8.3%

smaller farms, 41% of the producers that will stop farming within the next 10 years, expect the farm to continue producing milk. This means that 59% of the farmers that plan to discontinue farming in the next 10 years, will not continue producing milk. What does this mean? If there are 330 farms under 150 cows, **we can expect at least 75 farms to discontinue milking in the next 10 years.** This would not include those who leave unexpectedly (low milk prices, death, etc). From 1997 to 2007 there was a 38% drop in herd numbers in FDL County; based on this survey, this trend is likely to continue.

What about production and facilities on these farms?

These farms average 69.8 lbs/cow/day (Table 5). This would be 21,289 lbs on a 305 day lactation. The NASS (National Agricultural Statistical Service) has pegged FDL County at 21,200 lbs/cow in 2006. Yep, that's as close as it gets. In this survey the larger herds average 78 lbs/cow/day and the small herds average 67 lbs/cow/day. I

	All Farms	Less than 150 cows	More than 150 cows
Average milk production (lbs/cow/day)	69.8	67	78
Average SCC (last month – milk plant)	200.0	199	204

also asked the question, "What was the average SCC last month for your herd?" The answer was nearly the same for both groups, around 200 SCC. Most of the larger herds have freestalls for housing (94%) and milk in parlors (79%). Most of the smaller herds have tiestalls for housing (75%) and milk in the tiestalls (85%).

Goals for the next 5 years?

Table 6 lays out some differences between the two herd sizes. Large herds intend to increase herd size (56%), and modernize their manure (44%), milking (29.4%) and housing (44.1%) systems. A smaller percentage of small herds intend to make the same changes.

	Less than 150 cows	More than 150 cows
No change	44.0%	26.5%
Leave Farming	14.7%	0.0%
Modernize	24.8%	64.7%
Manure System	11.9%	44.1%
Milking Facilities	11.9%	29.4%
Housing	13.8%	44.1%
Increase Herd Size	11.0%	55.9%
Reduce Herd Size	10.1%	2.9%
Go Organic	3.7%	2.9%

Employee Information

The average small farm has 1.4 employees (an average of 109 cows); the average larger herd in this survey has an average of 8.4 employees (an average of 487 cows/farm). These estimates come pretty close to the 50 cow/person rule of thumb; these numbers do not reflect the number of owner/operators on each farm. An employee survey was conducted in the summer of 2007 to look at the demographics and needs of the employees. These results are coming out this winter.

**What areas do producers want more information?
What's important to them?**

To get at this question I asked producers to rate different topics on a scale of 1 to 7 with 7 being very important Table 7. When you look at the numbers it is difficult to say one or two topics really surface as the most important. In general the larger herds rated all topics higher.

Rank	All Farms		Less than 150 Cows		More than 150 Cows	
		Rating		Rating		Rating
1	Foot Health	4.6	Foot Health	4.5	Manure Management	4.9
2	Reproductive Management	4.2	Reproductive Management	4.1	Foot Health	4.8
3	Dairy Nutrition	4.2	Dairy Nutrition	4.1	Financial Management	4.8
4	Forages	4.1	Forages	3.9	Transition Cow Management	4.7
5	Transition Cow Management	4.1	Transition Cow Management	3.9	Dairy Facilities	4.6
6	Milk Quality	4.0	Milk Quality	3.9	Milk Quality	4.5
7	Genetics	3.9	Genetics	3.8	Forages	4.5
8	Financial Management	3.8	Dairy Replacements	3.5	Whole Farm Business Planning	4.5
9	Dairy Facilities	3.8	Land Use Issues	3.5	Dairy Nutrition	4.4
10	Manure Management	3.7	Financial Management	3.5	Land Use Issues	4.4
11	Land Use Issues	3.7	Dairy Facilities	3.5	Reproductive Management	4.4
12	Dairy Replacements	3.7	Manure Management	3.4	Dairy Modernization	4.4
13	Dairy Price Risk Management	3.6	Dairy Price Risk Management	3.4	Dairy Price Risk Management	4.3
14	Dairy Modernization	3.5	Dairy Modernization	3.3	Genetics	4.2
15	Whole Farm Business Planning	3.5	Whole Farm Business Planning	3.2	Dairy Replacements	4.1
16	Dairy Biosecurity	3.3	Dairy Biosecurity	3.1	Dairy Biosecurity	4.0
17	Dairy Production Records	3.2	Dairy Production Records	3.0	Employee Training	3.9
18	Employee Training	2.5	Employee Training	2.1	Dairy Production Records	3.8
19	Grazing	1.9	Grazing	1.9	Grazing	2.0
20	Organic Farming	1.6	Organic Farming	1.7	Organic Farming	1.5

Where do producers get their information?

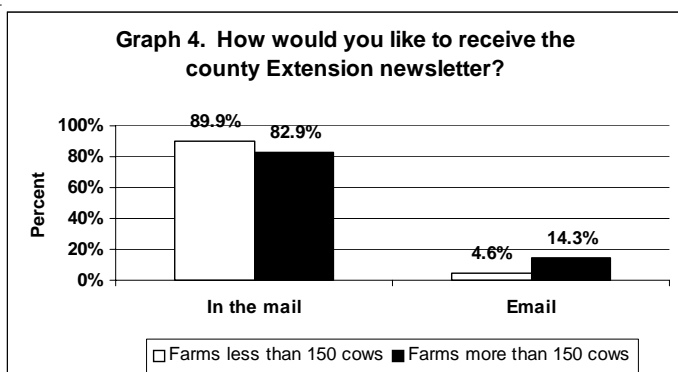
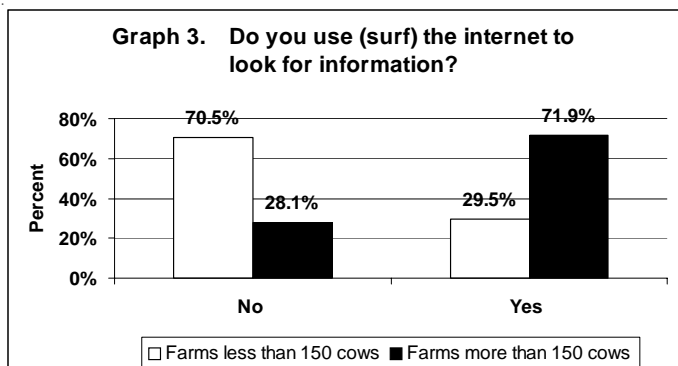
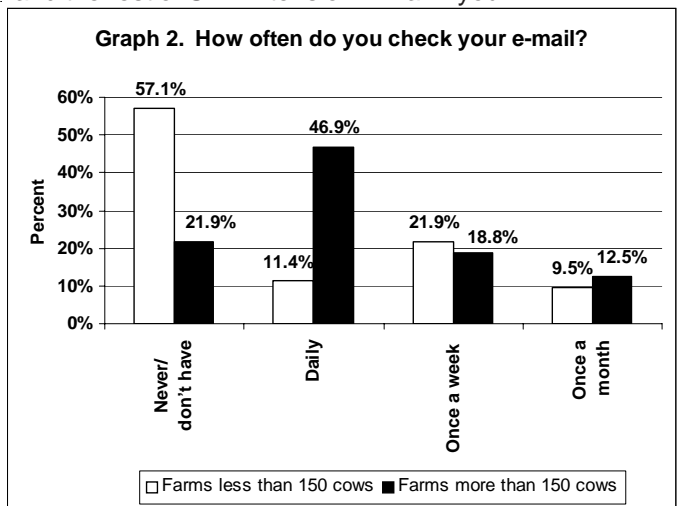
To answer this question, producers were asked to rate the importance of information sources (1 being low - 7 being high). For larger producers, the highest ranked source of information is their nutritionist and consultant while the veterinarian is the most important on smaller farms. See Table 8.

Rank	Farms less than 150 cows		Farms more than 150 cows	
	Category	Rating	Category	Rating
1	Veterinarian	5.4	Nutritionist /Consultant	6.0
2	Ag. Newspapers (State Farmer, Agriview)	5.0	Veterinarian	5.9
3	Monthly Publications (Hoards, Dairy Today etc.)	5.0	Monthly Publications (Hoards, Dairy Today etc.)	5.1
4	Nutritionist /Consultant	4.9	Ag. Newspapers (State Farmer, Agriview)	4.9
5	Extension Newsletter	4.2	Extension Newsletter	4.9
6	Milking Equipment Rep	4.0	Milking Equipment Rep	4.6
7	Radio	3.1	Web/Internet/E-mail	4.1
8	Television	2.5	Pharmaceutical Rep	3.1
9	Web/Internet/E-mail	2.5	Radio	2.9
10	Pharmaceutical Rep	1.9	Television	2.4

How are farmers connecting to the internet/web/e-mail?

One of the questions that often comes up is how are dairy producers adapting to the new information age? This survey gives some interesting answers. Graphs 2 through 5 give some interesting insight into this new technology. About 65% of the larger herds check their e-mail at least once a week while only 35% of the smaller herds check their e-mail at least once a week. About 70% of the larger herds use the web to look for information compared to only about 30% of smaller herds. The final question is perhaps the most interesting in relation to how producers want to receive information. When asked how they prefer to receive the County Extension Newsletter, over 88% of the herds still want to receive it in the mail (90% of the small herds and 83% of the large herds). Having talked to a number of producers, it seems likely to me that there are two reasons for this. First, high speed internet is not available to most producers so that navigating the web and receiving e-mail can be slow at times. Second, there is still a preference for having a publication in hand; something that is mobile and can transported to another room (perhaps a room like the bathroom).

So now what? I plan on using the survey to plan my next couple of years. The survey will help me decide what is the best way to connect with and impact dairy producers. Finally after a few years, I hope a follow-up survey will help me determine if I am having an impact. Again, thank-you to all who helped fill out and send back the surveys. The great response makes the results meaningful for myself and the rest of UW Extension. Thank-you.



For more information, contact:
 Paul Dyk, Fond du Lac County UW-Extension
 920-929-3171 or paul.dyk@ces.uwex.edu