

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
Results from the Survey of Kentucky Dairy Producers

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THE STUDY

In the spring of 2007, the Kentucky Department of Agriculture, The Kentucky Dairy Development Council, and the University of Kentucky College of Agriculture sponsored a survey of dairy producers in an attempt to assess how information is disseminated, services utilized, government programs, current operations and establish a demographic breakdown of current producers.

Kentucky Dairy Producer Characteristics

Nearly 600 surveys were collected from producers in 74 different counties. Of those responding 20% are between 20 to 39 years of age; 54% are 40 to 59; 24% are 60 years of age and older. The level of education was reported as follows: 29% less than High School completion; 42% graduated from High School; 14% completed some College; and 25% graduated College or Graduate School. 60% of producers described their farm as a “sole-ownership” practice and 36% said it was a family based partnership. The producers predominantly expressed their future plans were “uncertain” (38%); 23% indicated “no change”; 22% plan to “expand”; 11% said they would “retire”; and 6% will likely “disperse.” 12% indicated they plan on transitioning their farm ownership to another family member in the next 5 years.

Producer Operations

Twenty percent declared they relied on additional farm labor. Seventy percent stated one or more family members worked on the farm; 39% listed one or more local hired laborers; and 8% reported having one or more migrant laborers working on their farm. Nine and a half percent of producers reported milking 126 or more cows; 11.1% owned 31 or more dry cows; and 19% had more than 75 replacement heifers on their farm. When asked about access to computer and internet related sources of information 58% have a computer at their home/farm office, and 56% have internet access from their home or farm. The four highest selected sources for income other than dairy were: tobacco (33%), hay (31%), beef (31%), and grains (27%). Fifty-two percent reported that off-farm earnings were a portion of their household income.

Important Issues, Services and Government Operations

Producers were asked about issues and how they received valuable information, the five sources most frequently selected as most important were: dairy magazines/newspapers, other dairy producers, dairy field representatives, cooperative extension, and milk haulers. The three services most often utilized by producers were: nutritionist, herd health programs, and artificial breeding. Producers responded: they benefited from Phase I tobacco county program dollars (67%); would consider utilizing

low interest loans to expand/improve (61%); and they attend local dairy producer meetings/events (61%). The two functions of the Kentucky Milk Safety Branch most widely reported were explanations on your farm inspection sheet being clear and understandable (94%), and being basically familiar with the Pasteurized Milk Ordinance (46%). The two primary objectives of the Federal Milk Market Order most commonly known were that the Federal Milk Marketing Orders operate testing laboratories to test various components (42%) and they have a reasonably good understanding of the pricing system and how different “classes” of milk prices are determined (31%).

UK Regulatory Services

Over half of the participants ranked each of the following “high priority” with regard to the UK division of regulatory services: milk lab testing procedures (77%); milk lab testing records (73%); and milk payment and accounting records (71%); milk hauling procedures (55%); and milk hauling records (54%). Producers were most aware the UK regulatory services for herd bulk tank testing (50%) and UK personnel availability to reconstruct calibration charts at no charge (47%).

SUMMARY

The farmers reporting represented a very large and diverse group. A wide variety of ages, education, production levels, and interests were documented and several issues and programs were given extremely significant rates of response. This sample is the result of three reminder mailings accounting for over 50% of the original mailing. These findings suggest that the producers are eager to explore new methods and support additional research to hopefully improve the condition of the dairy industry in Kentucky. Among the key issues is milk pricing, and more UK and government supported programming which is widely believed to have the potential for positive impacts.