How Does Your Dairy Operation Compare?

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The USDA recently published the findings of their January 2007 survey on the health and management of dairy cattle in the U.S. in 2006. The report contains the summary information of the interviews of 2,194 dairy producers in 17 of the Nation's major dairy states (5 western and 12 eastern). The states included in the survey represented about 80% of the U.S. dairy operations. The findings provide interesting information that can be useful to dairy producers and the industry. Below are listed some of the findings in the report.

- about 20% of the herds were in the western states and 80% in the eastern states
- almost half of the herds interviewed had under 100 cows, and 22% had over 500 cows
- the primary breed in 92% of the dairies was Holstein, while in 3.5% it was Jerseys
- 95% of the herds had at least 1 Holstein cow, while 18% had at least one Jersey cow
- 46% of the herds used DHIA for individual animal record-keeping, while 49% used some other method – 5% kept no records on individual animals
- only 13.6% of the herds had registered cattle
- 27% of the herds had a RHA milk production of 22,000 lbs/cow or greater
- days dry averaged 57.8 for all operations, with little difference by herd size
- calving interval averaged 13.2 months, with little difference by herd size
- average age at 1st calving was 25.2 months, with the value less for larger herds
- 6.5% of the calves were born dead or died within 48 hours of birth
- 83% of the dairies vaccinated heifers for one or more diseases
- the primary housing type was about 23% tie stall/stanchion, 23% freestalls, 20% pasture, and smaller percentages for various combinations
- 40% of the operations (but 78% of the cows) milked in some type of parlor
- 42% of the operations used a feed company nutritionist to balance feed rations
- 95% of the operations used some preventative practice for cows - providing vitamin A-D-E or selenium in feed and deworming were most frequently practiced
- 82% of the operations used some type of vaccination for cows, with BVD, IBR, Lepto, BRSV, and PI3 being most frequently used
- 34% of herds were vaccinating cows for *E. coli* mastitis
- the percentage of cows identified by producers with various health problems were 16.5% with clinical mastitis, 14% with lameness, 12.9% with fertility problems, 7.8% with retained placenta, and then smaller percentages with other health issues
- the % of cows removed from herds was 26% for reproductive problems, 23% for mastitis and udder problems, 16% for poor production, 16% for lameness or injury
- the death loss in unweaned heifers was 7.8%, for weaned heifers it was 1.8%, and for cows it was 5.7%
- in 94% of the operations at least one other species of animal had contact with the cattle and/or feed, mineral, or water supply – this is a biosecurity risk
- about 39% of the operations brought some type of cattle onto the farm during the year

- the % of cattle that were brought onto the farm that were quarantined were 44% of unweaned calves, 23% of weaned unbred heifers, 14.5% of bred heifers, 12% of lactating cows, and 16% of dry cows (a biosecurity risk)
-for operations that brought animals onto the farm, only 47% required some type of vaccination before bringing the animal onto the farm (a biosecurity risk)
- only 23% of the operations that brought animals onto the farm required some type of disease testing before bringing the animal onto the farm (a biosecurity risk)
- only 11.7% of the operations that brought animals onto the farm tested for contagious mastitis pathogens before bringing the animal onto the farm (a biosecurity risk)

While these survey results reveal some interesting facts about our U.S. dairy operations in 2006 that probably have not changed much in two years, they also point out the vulnerability of our operations to the spread of diseases. All producers should improve the practices they use to care for and protect the health and well-being of their animals.