

Dairy Cattle and Milk Production

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A \$35.5 billion industry, 9 percent of total U.S. agriculture sales.

77 percent...

... of farms that sold milk from cows in 2012 were family or individually owned.

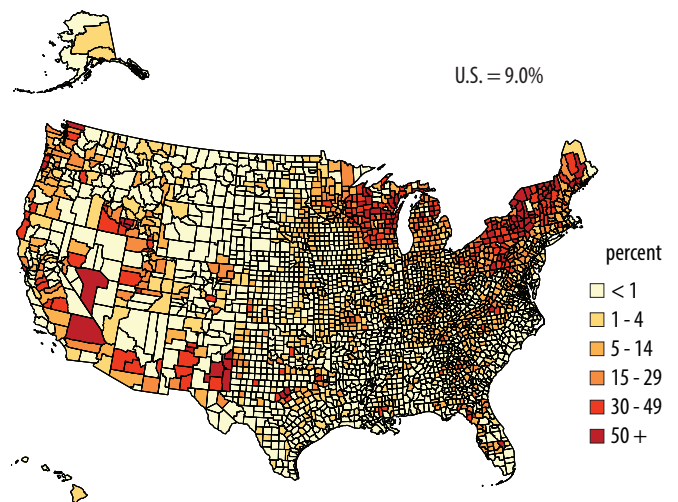
Top States in Sales (\$ billions)

California	6.9
Wisconsin	5.0
New York	2.4
Idaho	2.3
Pennsylvania	2.0
Texas	1.7
Minnesota	1.6
Michigan	1.5
New Mexico	1.3
Washington	1.1

In 2012, sales of milk from cows in the United States totaled \$35.5 billion, accounting for 9 percent of total U.S. agriculture sales. Although every state produces and sells milk, California and Wisconsin together account for a third of U.S. sales.

The top ten states account for nearly three fourths of sales. The 2012 Census of Agriculture provides a comprehensive picture of the dairy cattle industry.

Sales of Milk from Cows as Percent of Agriculture Sales, by County, 2012



Source: USDA NASS, 2012 Census of Agriculture.

Industry Size, Value, and Location

U.S. farmers had a combined inventory of 9.3 million milk cows at the end of 2012, down 0.2 percent from 2007, when the agriculture census was last conducted. The number of farms with milk cows declined 8 percent in that time, from 69,890 farms in 2007 to 64,098 farms in 2012.

Farms specializing in dairy cattle and milk production (that is, farms with more than half of sales coming from the production of milk from cows)

declined even more, from 57,318 farms in 2007 to 46,005 farms in 2012 (a 20 percent decline).

California led the country, with 1.8 million milk cows at the end of 2012 and \$6.9 billion in 2012 milk sales. Wisconsin was second, with 1.3 million milk cows and \$5.0 billion in sales, followed by New York, Idaho, and Pennsylvania. These five states accounted for 52 percent of both milk cow inventory and milk sales.

At the county level, seven of the top ten counties in milk sales were in California. Tulare County, California, ranked first in the nation, with \$1.8 billion in sales, or 5 percent of U.S. milk sales.

Top Counties in Cow's Milk Sales (\$ billions)

Tulare, CA	1.8
Merced, CA	1.1
Gooding, ID	0.7
Stanislaus, CA	0.7
Kings, CA	0.6
Kern, CA	0.5
Yakima, WA	0.4
Lancaster, PA	0.4
Fresno, CA	0.4
San Joaquin, CA	0.4

Does not include counties withheld to avoid disclosing individual data.

Source: USDA NASS, 2012 Census of Agriculture.

Production Costs

Farms specializing in dairy cattle and milk production accounted for 97 percent of U.S. milk sales (\$34.5 billion). Their production costs were \$32.8 billion, up 31 percent from 2007. The largest expense item was feed, which totaled \$15.6 billion, or nearly half (48 percent) of total production costs. Per farm average costs were \$713,164, a 64 percent increase over 2007.

Farm Characteristics

In 2012, 77 percent of dairy farms were family or individually owned; they accounted for 45 percent of milk sales. In contrast, corporations accounted for 7 percent of farms and 19 percent of sales.

Between 2007 and 2012, the proportion of milk cow inventory on smaller operations declined and the proportion on larger operations increased. Operations with fewer than 1,000 milk cows accounted for 60 percent of the U.S. milk cow inventory in 2007 and 51 percent in 2012. Operations with 1,000 or more milk cows accounted for 49 percent of 2012 inventory, up from 40 percent in 2007. (Table 1)

Table 1
Milk Cow Inventory by Size of Operation, 2007 and 2012

No. of Milk Cows on Operation	2007 Inventory		2012 Inventory	
	millions	%	millions	%
<50	0.7	7	0.6	6
50 – 99	1.3	14	1.0	11
100 – 999	3.6	39	3.1	34
1,000 – 2,499	1.7	18	1.9	20
2,500+	2.0	22	2.6	29
Total U.S. inventory	9.3	100	9.3	100

Source: USDA NASS, 2012 Census of Agriculture.

Producer Characteristics

The 2012 Census of Agriculture identified characteristics of those responsible for the day-to-day operation of farms specializing in dairy cattle and milk production. These farmers on average were younger (52 years old) than principal operators overall (58 years old). Five percent were women, a slight decrease from 2007, and lower than the proportion of female principal operators for all farms in 2012.

Principal operators of dairy farms were more likely to consider farming their primary occupation in 2012 than in 2007, and much more likely to do so than farmers overall. Nearly three fourths (73 percent) earned at least half of their income from farming, compared to only 22 percent for principal operators overall. Thirty-six percent derived all of their income from the farm. (Table 2)

Table 2
Dairy Cattle and Milk Producers: Key Characteristics, 2007 and 2012
(principal operator)

	2007	2012	All Farms 2012
	percent		
Gender			
Male	94	95	86
Female	6	5	14
Age			
Under 45 years	28	28	16
45 to 64 years	56	57	51
65 years and older	16	15	33
Primary Occupation			
Farming	87	90	48
Other	13	10	52
Percent of Income from Farming			
< 25%	23	20	70
25% to 49%	8	7	8
50% to 74%	14	15	9
75% to 99%	22	22	7
100%	33	36	6
Average Age (years)	51.6	51.9	58.3

Principal operator is the person responsible for day-to-day operation of the farm.

Source: USDA NASS, 2012 Census of Agriculture.

To learn more about dairy cattle farming and milk production, the 2012 Census of Agriculture, and how to access national, state, and county data, go to:

www.agcensus.usda.gov