2017 CENSUS OF AGRICULTURE *Highlights*

Dairy Cattle and Milk Production

Milk sales and milk cow inventory up, number of farms down, since 2012

ACH17-4/September 2019

In 2017, U.S. farmers had 9.5 million milk cows and sales of milk from cows totaling $36.7 billion, accounting for 9.5 percent of total U.S. agriculture sales. California and Wisconsin accounted for about a third of U.S. sales. The top five states accounted for half. Of 40,336 farms that produced and sold milk from cows, 89 percent were specialized dairy farms that accounted for 98 percent of milk sold in 2017. These farms had $33.3 billion in production expenses.

9.5 million milk cows

40,336 farms

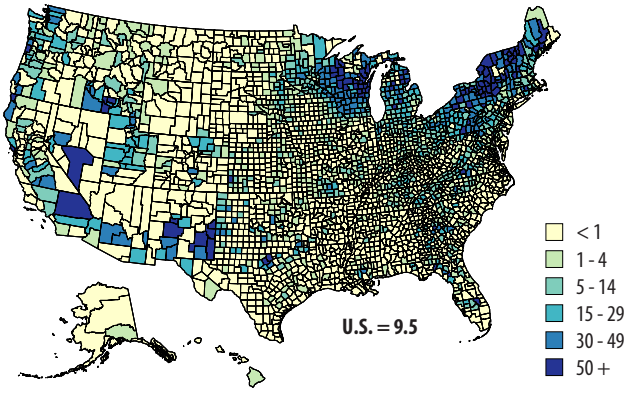
$36.7 billion milk sales

Number and Location

U.S. farmers had 9.5 million milk cows at the end of 2017, up 3.1 percent from 2012, when the Census of Agriculture was last conducted. During that time, the number of farms with sales of milk from cows declined 20 percent, from 50,556 farms to 40,336 farms. Sales of cow's milk totaled $36.7 billion in 2017, up 3.4 percent from 2012.

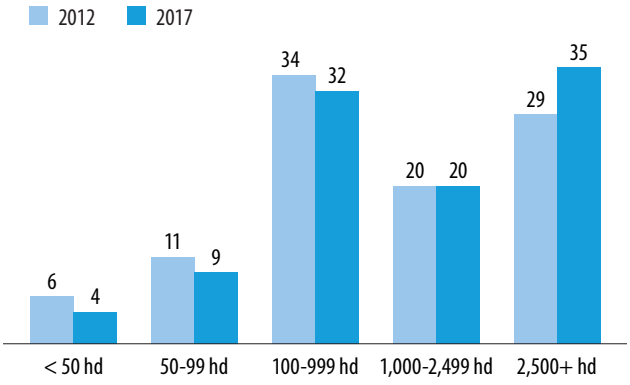
California led the country in both milk cow inventory and sales, with 1.8 million milk cows at the end of 2017 and $6.5 billion in 2017 milk sales. Wisconsin was second, followed by New York, Idaho, and Texas. These five states accounted for 50 percent of milk cow inventory and 51 percent of milk sales. The top ten states accounted for 72 percent of U.S. milk sales.

Sales of Milk from Cows as Percent of Agriculture Sales, by County, 2017



Top States	($ bil)
California	6.5
Wisconsin	5.2
New York	2.5
Idaho	2.3
Texas	2.2
Pennsylvania	2.0
Michigan	1.8
Minnesota	1.7
New Mexico	1.3
Washington	1.1

Percent of Milk Cow Inventory, by Size of Operation (no. of head), 2012 and 2017



Between 2012 and 2017, the proportion of milk cows on smaller operations (with fewer than 1,000 milk cows) declined from 51 percent to 45 percent. The proportion on larger operations (2,500 milk cows or more) increased from 29 percent to 35 percent. The proportion on mid-sized operations stayed the same at 20 percent.

$1.8 billion

At $1.8 billion in 2017 milk sales, Tulare County, California, accounted for 5 percent of U.S. milk sales. Four of the top five counties in milk sales are in California.

United States Department of Agriculture
National Agricultural Statistics Service

www.nass.usda.gov/AgCensus

SNAPSHOT

Dairy Producers, 2017

Number = 74,988*

	Dairy	All U.S.
	(percent)	
Sex		
Male	70	64
Female	30	36
Age		
<35	18	8
35 - 64	66	58
65+	16	34
Years farming		
10 or less	21	27
11 or more	79	73
Lived on their farm	85	74
Worked off farm		
No days	70	39
1 to 199 days	15	21
200+ days	15	40
Primary occupation		
Farming	84	42
Other	16	58
With military service	3	11
Average age (years)	50.2	57.5

** Producers on 37,750 specialized dairy farms as defined by the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS). More than half of a farm's sales come from milking dairy cattle. Data collected for up to four producers per farm.*

About the Census

The Census of Agriculture, conducted once every five years, is a complete count of U.S. farms and ranches and the people who operate them. Results from the 2017 and earlier censuses are available at national, state, and county levels.

See the searchable database Quick Stats, the new Census Data Query Tool, downloadable PDF reports, maps, and a variety of topic-specific products.

www.nass.usda.gov/AgCensus

Producer Characteristics

The producers on farms specializing in dairy cattle and milk production were, on average, younger (50.2) than U.S. producers overall (57.5). Thirty percent worked one or more days off the farm, compared to 61 percent of all U.S. producers. Dairy producers were more likely to consider farming their primary occupation than U.S. producers overall (84 percent versus 42 percent) and more likely to live on their farm (85 percent versus 74 percent). Almost all dairy producers (99 percent) are white.

The percent of dairy producers who are women. **30**

Farm Characteristics

Farms specializing in dairy cattle and milk production accounted for 98 percent of U.S. milk sales. Most of these farms (84 percent) had sales and government payments of $100,000 or more.

Economic Class *(sales and government payments)*	Dairy Farms *(percent of total)*	All Farms *(percent of total)*
< $10,000	6	55
$10,000 - $99,999	10	26
$100,000 - $499,999	51	11
$500,000 - $999,999	15	4
$1,000,000 +	18	4

$1.5 billion

The amount of organic sales by specialized dairy farms, 21 percent of total U.S. organic agriculture sales.

Average Farm

On average, dairy farms have higher levels of sales than all U.S. farms, larger land area, greater production expenses, and higher net income.

	Dairy Farms	All Farms
Avg. acres	461	441
Avg. sales	$1,122,724	$190,245
Avg. government payments	$10,264	$13,906
Avg. expenses	$882,714	$159,821
Avg. net cash farm income	$259,194	$43,053

Production Expenses

The production costs of farms specializing in dairy cattle and milk production totaled $33.3 billion, up 1.6 percent from 2012. At $14.9 billion, feed was the largest expense item, accounting for 45 percent of production expenses.

	($ bil)
Feed	14.9
Hired labor	3.9
Repairs and supplies	2.2
Vet and medicine	1.2
Interest	1.2
Custom work and hauling	1.2
Fuels	1.0
Other expenses	7.7

Among Dairy Farms

67% Have internet access

61% Hire farm labor

95% Are family farms

85% Have net positive income

Source: USDA NASS, 2017 Census of Agriculture.