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The movement towards socially responsible dairy farming in the USA

A. De Vries¹

¹ University of Florida, Department of Animal Sciences, 2250 Shealy Drive, 32608 Gainesville, FL, United States

Dairy farming has been under increased public scrutiny for up to two decades now in the USA. This scrutiny stems from (non)consumer interest in the origins of their food, and views on animal welfare and the environmental footprint of dairy production. The objective of this review is to give an overview of responses and proactive steps the US dairy sector has been taking to maintain a social license to produce. The USA is home to over 9 million dairy cows. While this number has not changed much for the last 2 decades, the number of dairy farms has decreased from over 70 000 to 26 000 today. Consequently, the average herd size has increased greatly. However, there is little evidence that the US public sees larger dairy farms as undesirable. Nevertheless, the low density of dairy farms means that few people have first-hand experience with dairy farms. Open house programs such as Breakfast on the Farm provide the public access to dairy farms and show how dairy production takes place. Two decades ago, the dairy sector was more contentious about public scrutiny of production practices and believed that public education was the main solution. Since then, the sector has embraced programs such as Farmers Assuring Responsible Management (FARM), that use science-based standards, verifications, metrics, and other tools to improve best management practices in areas of animal care, antibiotic stewardship, biosecurity, environmental stewardship, and workforce development. The goal is to continue to show customers and consumers that the dairy sector holds itself to the highest standards. The dairy sector is also responding to calls to reduce its environmental footprint by conducting lifecycle analyses and investing in impact reducing feed additives, digesters, genetics, and water saving technologies. The US dairy sector widely recognizes that socially responsible dairy farming must increasingly consist of practices that are good for planet, people, and profitability.

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Dairy sector in Ukraine

M. Matvieiev¹, S. Ruban¹, A. Getya¹, H. Lavreniuk², D. Nosevych¹, R. Kononenko¹

¹ National University of Life and Environmental Sciences of Ukraine, Horlivatskyi shliakh str. 19, 03041 Kyiv, Ukraine, ² Association of Milk Producers, Ivana Honny str. 3, 20300 Uman, Ukraine

In 2025 total nr of cows is 1177.7 thousand, which is 377.6 thousand less than just before beginning of the full-scale war. 68% of the cows is kept in households, which number has decreased significantly. The nr of cows in agricultural enterprises also decreased, but the share increased by 4.8% compared to 01.01.2022. In 2024, there were 1309 dairy farms. 84.7% of farms had less than 500 cows, but 55.2% of cows were kept on farms with more than 500 heads. Ukraine produced 7.2 million t of milk, which was 21.0% less compared with yr 2021. Milk production from households has decreased by 28.5% since 2021, milk production in agricultural enterprises has increased by 6.7%. In 2024, volume of milk delivered for processing reached pre-war levels totaling 3.223 million t. The quality of milk supplied for processing has generally improved. The amount of "Extra" milk in 2024 was 1.6-times higher than in 2021. This may be explained by the structural decline in smaller farms which result in higher overall quality milk. There are 120 registered dairy processing plants, with the biggest plant processing 600 t and smallest ones about 30 t of raw milk per day. All are privately owned and several are international dairy processors, of which 38 have a permission to export products to EU. Cooperative dairy processing is not developed due to consequences of the Soviet regime. Last 10 yr, small dairy farms have started developing small-scale dairy processing, so called craft production and added-value creation. Main challenges for dairy farming are: survival in the circumstances of the full-scale invasion; lack of personnel due to mobilization and forced migration; relocation of enterprises from war-affected regions; demining fields to ensure fodder production; electricity generators supply for farms and plants from blackouts affected regions and diversification of energy sources; adherence to anti-epidemic measures due to recent epizootic outbreaks; awareness raising and financial support of modernization of farms and plants to meet EU integration requirements on animal welfare and health, food safety, environment and climate, and a level playing field for agricultural trade with EU.