

2008 DAIRY MODERNIZATION SURVEY

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The UW-Extension Dairy Team recently surveyed Wisconsin producers who had modernized their dairy facilities within the past several years. UW-Extension county

agriculture agents assisted in identifying 99 farms from 30 counties across the state to be included in this survey.

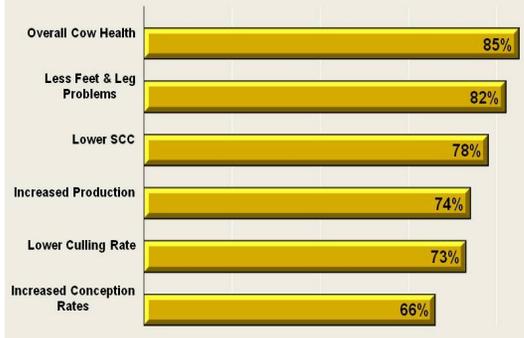
Dairy farms targeted for the survey included mostly medium sized family farms. The average herd size in the survey was 82 milk cows prior to modernization and increased to 202 milk cows after modernizing. The herd sizes after modernization ranged from a start up herd with 15 cows to the largest herd now milking 865 cows. The survey included 14 grazing and 85 confinement operations. Fifty-five of the farms had built retrofit parlors into existing facilities and 34 constructed their parlor in a new building.

The survey was conducted to determine what the producers had observed as being the major benefits to modernizing, both from the personal and the cow standpoint. The survey was also used to determine what educational resources the producers used and valued the most in the modernization process; what they thought was the most challenging part of the process; and the one thing producers would change in their modernization process/project if they could do it over again.

The dairies converting from a stall barn to some type of parlor milking system reported an average of 22 cows per person per hour being milked in the stall barn prior to modernization, and 42 cows per person per hour being milked in a parlor system after modernization. Parlor types in the survey included: flat, parabone (swing), parallel, herringbone and rotary. The average time spent feeding the milk cows also dropped, from 1.48 minutes per cow per day in the stall barn to .55 minutes per cow per day after modernizing.

When asked what the biggest benefits to the cows were from modernizing 85 percent of the producers indicated overall cow health was improved. Less foot and leg problems were listed as the second highest benefit to the cows, followed in order by: lower somatic cell counts, increased production, lower culling rate and increased conception rates.

Cow Benefits Observed



The reduction in labor per cow was listed as the number one personal benefit the producers gained from modernizing their facilities with 96 percent of producers reporting it as a benefit. Improved working conditions and safety for workers was listed second, and allowing the business to continue was seen as the third most important personal benefit. These were followed in order by: increased profitability, providing entry for the next generation and increased family time.

People Benefits Observed



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The most used and most useful educational resources identified by the producers were:

- Touring other farms (99 percent)
- Farm visits and seminars conducted by UW-Extension state specialists and county agents (86 percent)
- Magazines and newspapers
- Farm shows
- U.W. publications and newsletters

The survey showed the average planning time for the modernization project was 23 months on the 99 farms in the survey. The average time it took for dairies to convert from a stall barn to a parlor milking system (from the start of construction to completion) was 17 weeks. When asked if they would still be in the dairy business if they had not modernized their facilities 46 percent indicated they would no longer be in the dairy business had they not modernized.

When producers were asked what the biggest challenge was they faced in the modernization process the top answer was working with contractors and/or serving as the general contractor on the project. The next biggest challenges they reported were: deciding what system and number of cows would work the best on their farm, followed by budgeting and financing, facility design, cost overruns, and finding good and knowledgeable contractors.



The number one response to what the producers would change if they could do it over was they would have done the modernization sooner. The second most popular response was they would have made either the parlor or the freestall barns bigger, and the third highest comment was they would have started at an alternate site to allow for future expansion.

Several significant impacts were observed on the farms after modernization. Milk production per cow increased by an average of 1,439 pounds while the average herd size increased by 121 cows. This resulted in an average increase of over 2.7 million pounds of milk sold per farm. The amount of labor per cow was also reduced 50% after modernizing. These impacts are shown in the table below.

A complete listing of the 2008 modernization survey results are available from your local county UW-Extension office, and online at the UW-Extension Dairy Team Modernization website: <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/dairymod/index.cfm>

Dairy Modernization Impacts

	Pre Modernization	Post Modernization	Change
Average Herd Size	82	203	+121
Average Production per Cow (lbs)	20,245	21,684	+1,439
Milk Production per Farm Annually (lbs.)	1,660,090	4,401,852	+2,741,762
Annual Hours of Labor per Cow	51.8	26.0	25.8
Milk Cows / F.T.E.	35	50	15

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