

Iowa Dairy Goat Survey Conducted to Assess the Industry and Needs of Dairy Goat Producers

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Summary and Implications

With limited resources and networking opportunities for dairy goat producers, particularly those in Amish and Mennonite communities, producers have requested assistance from Iowa State University Extension and Outreach in developing educational opportunities to assist in fine-tuning their dairy goat management. With the use of a statewide dairy goat producer survey to assess management and needs, the Iowa State University Extension and Outreach Dairy Team has started to develop resources including newsletters, webinars, website content, and a grant collaboration to conduct research and outreach. Long-term outcomes include development of these educational programs includes knowledge gain, marketing, financial and production management changes; for overall improved dairy goat performance and increased profitability.

Introduction

Iowa currently ranks third in total milk goats according to the Iowa Ag News service, just behind California and Wisconsin. Approximately 20% of Iowa dairy operations are dairy goat producers with 200 licensed operations milking 32,000 does.

In 2019, the **Iowa State University Extension and Outreach Dairy Team** contracted the Center for Survey Statistics and Methodology (CSSM) at Iowa State University to conduct a mail survey with dairy goat farmers in Iowa to learn more about their operation, current needs, and expectations for the future.

This survey was part of a research effort coordinated by Leo Timms, emeritus professor of animal science and retired extension dairy specialist at Iowa State, and Jennifer Bentley, dairy specialist with ISU Extension and Outreach, who served as principal investigators on this project. Other ISU Extension and Outreach dairy team members Fred Hall, Melissa O'Rourke, and Larry Tranel assisted with the project Bentley and Kristen Burke, a former farm management specialist with ISU Extension and Outreach, analyzed and compiled survey results for Iowa State and collaborators. Results provide insight on the current state of

the dairy goat industry in Iowa and will be summarized and provided through reports for dairy goat producers, educators, industry collaborators, and the public. This information will help educators and industry collaborators determine educational programming areas in the short and long term. Additionally, results will help all audiences better understand the demographics of dairy goat farms, management practices used, and the future of the industry.

Materials and Methods

The survey was developed cooperatively by CSSM and the principal investigators. The survey was 12 pages in length and included questions relating to farm characteristics, dairy goat doe and kid management, manure management, financial management, potential changes in the operation, family labor, information sources, and farm and personal demographics. Printed copies of the survey were prepared by CSSM and mailed to 215 dairy goat milk producers on August 20, 2019 with a cover letter and postage-paid return envelope enclosed. A post card reminder was sent to 210 non-respondents on August 28, 2019, and a second copy of the survey was mailed to 165 non-respondents on September 9, 2019. The sample for this study consisted of 215 producers drawn from a list of all dairy goat operations in the state of Iowa (provided by Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship (IDALS) Dairy Bureau) and provided to CSSM by Timms. Of the 215 dairy goat farmers in the sample, three (1.4%) were classified as ineligible because they had no goats. Completed surveys were received from 88 farmers, for an overall response rate of 41.5%.

Results and Discussion

Of the respondents, the majority were male (97%), and average age was 43 years (22-75; 38% < 40). Forty-nine percent of dairy goat farmers got started in the dairy industry by previously milking cows, with the remaining a combination of either having parents or family members already working with dairy goats or a family member recommending raising and milking dairy goats.

Average Number of Milking and Dry Does:
2014 – 105 (range 0-700)
2019 – 155 (range 52-430)

While most operations are less than 350 head, the largest segment of goat operations has a herd size between 100- 199 head (55%). Although there has been limited growth in larger operations, small to medium sized operations have increased herd size over the last five years.

Milk production and composition

The Saanen breed is the predominant breed on 34% of dairy goat operations, with Alpine next at 27.3% (99% and 97% of herds have Saanen and Alpine, respectively). Rolling herd average is the yearly average production per doe for a herd. As shown in Table 3, over 60% of all herds had an annual milk production between 2,000-3,000 pounds per doe. Milk production is measured predominately through bulk tank only (68%) with 32% testing milk through Dairy Herd Improvement (DHIA).

As shown in Table 4, average fat and protein percent in milk produced is 3.03 and 2.69, with average Milk Urea Nitrogen (MUN) at 27.45. Average Somatic Cell Count (SCC) in milk for all herds is 986,000. Herds with higher production had a below average SCC while lower production herds had slightly higher than average SCC. Data was from August through October, reflecting mostly does in mid-late lactation.

Milking: In reference to dairy goat milking facilities, 55% are utilizing a bucket milker with 33% hand milking. Those milking in a parlor system showed 49% with parallel parlor, 26% parallel parlor with a rapid exit system, 3% herringbone, and 1% carousel (rotary) parlor. A majority of smaller herds, under 100 head, are hand milking, while larger herds are using a pipeline or parlor system. On average, 15 does can be milked at one time in their milking system, with 57% most commonly milking between 10 and 20 does at one time. All dairy goat operations milk twice a day. On average, 99 does per hour are milked depending on facility type; an average of 66 does per hour for bucket and between 110 and 130 for most other types of milking systems.

Housing: Seventy-six percent house their milking herd in a bedded pen with either a dirt or paved lot, while 24% house milking does in a bedded pen with total confinement. Operators have more recently updated milking equipment and facilities compared to housing facilities. Facility changes in the next 5-10 years was a lower priority due to the high percentages that have made facility changes and upgrades in past 10 years.

Dairy farm management

Respondents were asked questions regarding practices and records utilized in their operation.

Veterinary service: The main service operations seek from veterinarians is treatment recommendations, while treatment protocols, herd health, preventative practices, and education are other services producers commonly utilize. Eighty-five percent responded they have veterinarians in their areas with dairy goat experience. Forty-four percent utilize veterinary services 3-5 times a year, while 38% use only once a year.

Milk marketing: When selling milk, 48% of producers market milk through an independent processor, 44% market through a dairy farm cooperative, and 5% market to an organic dairy cooperative.

Records: Only 7% of operators use a computer to keep records for their operations, with 49% not keeping production records on individual goats. Those who do keep records use DHI records, PCDART, or another method.

Health and reproductive management: Operators employ a variety of practices and technologies to manage their dairy goats and operation. As listed in Table 5, common practices used include hoof trimming, deworming methods, routine vaccinations, individual doe SCC testing, external parasite control, and milk culturing. Operations are less likely to engage in practices related to dry doe treatments and reproduction practices such as AI or heat detection aids and breeding out of season.

Milking management

Dairy goat operators were asked about pre and post milking practices as part of their milking management (Table 6). Forty-eight percent of respondents use no pre-milking sanitation. The remaining 52% used a variety of Pre-milking sanitation practices (towels and sanitation wipes, commercial teat dip, homemade solution, or water) but only 23% dried teats prior to unit attachment. Only 23% fore-stripped teats prior to milking. Seventy-three percent of operators check udders post milk-out, with 27% utilizing a commercial or homemade solution for post-dip.

Doe management

Eighty-one percent of operators average a dry doe period of 60 days, with an average length of lactation of 300 days. The majority of does are moved into the milking string between one- and four-days post kidding. Ninety-four percent of first lactation does freshened at one year of age.

Kid management

Producers were asked how soon after birth the average dairy goat kid receives colostrum. Twenty-seven percent responded less than one hour after birth, 55% within 1-2 hours after birth, and 16% within 2-4 hours after birth.

On average, first feeding colostrum amount fed is 8.77 ounces (4-20 ounces); with a second feeding average of 7.85 ounces (0-24 ounces). Table 7 shows sources of colostrum fed. Thirty-six percent use visual appearance as a method to estimate immunoglobulins or colostrum quality in first kid feeding. Eight percent use volume of first milking colostrum, while 1% utilize a refractometer. Less than 2% of all operators routinely monitor serum proteins as a measure of passive transfer status of newborn kids.

When feeding dairy goat kids, 63% of producers utilize a lamb bar with multiple nipples, 32% utilize individual bottle feeding, 10% a free choice cold milk feeding program, 6% doe raised milk, and 3% utilize an automatic feeder. The remaining feed using a combination of buckets or bottles with nipples, an individual pan, or feeding trough.

Eighty-six percent of respondents feed kids twice a day, utilizing milk as shown in Table 8. The majority of

producers wean kids by age; followed by grain/starter consumption and bodyweight. The average weaning age of doe kids is 52.6 days (35-90 days); with an average weaning weight of 23.5 pounds (10-40 pounds). Buck kids are weaned around the same age at 50.4 days, weighing 24.4 pounds.

Feeding management

Dairy goat producers feed their milking herd one of three ways: 72% utilize grain feeding only while milking 42% limit feed with all animals having equal access 27% always have feed available. Primary forages include alfalfa hay; grass hay; and baleage. Additional forages include haylage, silage, and small grains. Feed allowances are based on individual milk yield, bodyweight, and pen average.

Eighty-nine percent feed using a forage in the trough or feeder with a separate concentrate supplement. Three percent utilize a total mixed ration, while 5% feed forage only. On average, 3.4 pounds of concentrate feed is fed to each milking doe per day (2-10 pounds). Within all animal groups, 50% feed once per day and 20% feed twice per day. Producers feeding the herd using a total mixed ration push up feed three times per day. Vitamins and minerals are provided primarily through free choice in the trough, included in the concentrate mix, or provided as a lick block and included in the total mixed ration if fed.

Water is available in 40% of operations by using an automatic water and nipple system; 28% utilizing a water tank or a combination of both watering systems. There are multiple ways producers manage the nutrition of their milking does. The majority of producers manage nutrition with the assistance from a feed mill, co-op, or feed store, with a combination of managing nutrition on their own, working with a nutritionist, or assistance from other dairy goat producers.

Health issues and management

There are many health issues dairy goat producers face in their operations. Those most commonly found are diarrhea in kids; CL (caseous lymphadenitis); internal parasites; mastitis; and CAE (caprine arthritis-encephalitis).

Figure 4 describes the frequency of all common health issues in dairy goat herds from not at all to very often. Only 26% of operations test for CAE, CL, or Johnes. If an animal does test positive, the animals are most commonly separated from the herd or sold. Treatment for health issues are managed in a variety of ways.

The main reasons animals leave dairy goat operations are due to low milk production; mastitis and udder problems; death; illness or injury; foot or leg problems; sold to someone else for milk production or breeding; or culled due to disposition.

Other reasons noted by producers include somatic cell count, reproduction, CAE, or too many replacements already in the herd.

Financial management, pricing, and issues in the dairy goat industry

Ninety percent of producers responded that dairy goats are profitable at current prices. The current average price per hundredweight of dairy goat milk received is \$37.91, with a range of \$25 to \$57. The average pricing they receive for buck kids is \$45, cull does is \$115, and replacement female kids is \$142.90. Eighty-nine percent of operations sell buck kids; with 43% selling at 10 days of age or younger and 44% selling 90 days or older, averaging 67 days old when sold. Only 18% of respondents know what it costs to produce a hundred pounds of dairy goat milk, averaging \$22.33. Currently, producers indicate that commodity prices, bacteria count, and somatic cell count are the top three conditions that have significant impact and concern on their dairy goat business.

Future of Iowa dairy goat industry

Participants were asked questions pertaining to the future of their dairy goat operation (Table 12). Forty-nine percent indicated they plan to expand their herd in the next five years. Herd expansion equaled average growth by 88 milking does. Thirty percent respondents projected updating facilities and equipment during the next 15 years.

Today's operators plan to stay in business as the majority of respondents do not plan to retire, discontinue milking, or sell the operation in the next 15 years.

Conclusion

Dairy goat producers see their herds as profitable, plan to continue to stay in the business (49% plan to expand) and expressed needs for enhanced education and service. This survey provides the platform of the existing industry while also forecasting needs and educational areas.

Acknowledgements

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For the full publication of the Iowa Dairy Goat Survey, go to: <https://store.extension.iastate.edu/product/15900>

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Table 5. Dairy goat management practices, use rate

Do you currently use any of the following dairy management practices or technologies?	
ANSWER	PERCENT
Hoof trimming	97
Deworming methods	94
Routine vaccinations	80
Individual doe Somatic Cell (SCC) testing	64
External parasite control on all animals	58
Milk culturing to identify mastitis	39
Dry doe treatment	17
Synchronization program for reproduction	11
Artificial insemination (AI)	2
Heat detection aids such as patch, chalk, paint	1
Breed out of season using lights	1
Breed out of season using hormones	1

Table 3. Annual average milk production, pounds per doe

POUNDS	PERCENT
501-1000	1.1
1001-2000	31.8
2001-3000	61.4
3001-4000	1.1
Don't know	2.3
Missing	2.3

Table 4. Average dairy goat herd components

	FAT	PROTEIN	MUN	SCCx1000
Average	3.03	2.69	27.45	986
St. Dev ±	0.25	0.16	3.15	288
Minimum	2.60	2.40	19.00	500
Maximum	3.80	3.20	35.50	1960

Table 6. Pre- and post-milking practices, use rate

PRE-MILKING PRACTICE	PERCENT USE
No pre-milking sanitation	48
Forestrip milk from teats	23
No drying of teats with towel	20
Dry teats with individual towels	15
Predip with commercial teat dip	13
Sanitation wipes	11
Wash with liquid and a common towel	10
Dry teats with a common towel	8
Predip with homemade solution	7
Wash with Udder Wash and individual towels	6
Wash with water and individual towels	5
POST-MILKING PRACTICE	PERCENT USE
Check udders for milkout	73
Postdip with commercial dip	23
Postdip with homemade solution	4

Table 7. Sources of colostrum fed, ranked by response

	YES, PERCENT	PREDOMINATE SOURCE, PERCENT
Raw colostrum from fresh doe	43	28
Commercial colostrum bovine based	43	31
Heat treated goat colostrum	29	22
Other commercial colostrum/ goat colostrum replacer	11	7
Heat treated cow colostrum	1	0
Raw cow colostrum	1	0

Table 8. Type of milk fed to kids, ranked by response

TYPE OF MILK FED TO KIDS	PERCENT USE
Milk replacer (formula intended for goat kids)	86
Unpasteurized goat milk	30
Pasteurized goat milk	16
Unpasteurized cow milk	8
Milk replacer (formula intended for lambs)	2
Pasteurized cow milk	1

