

Fewer dairies quit milking last year

Dairy farm numbers were down 3.4 percent from the previous year. That ties 2005 for the smallest-ever percentage drop.

by Hoard's Dairyman staff

RELATIVELY strong milk pricing in late 2007 and throughout the ensuing year encouraged many dairy producers to remain in business. So much so that only 3.4 percent or 2,003 dairy farms idled milk pumps last year. That represents the smallest percentage decline in dairy farm numbers and the lowest ever actual drop since milk permit tracking began in 1992. The 2,470 farms leaving the industry in 2005 was the second lowest actual drop in numbers.

Table 1 shows the 17-year history detailing the number of dairy farms holding permits to sell milk.

Year	Number	% change
1992	131,509	
1993	124,945	-5.0
1994	117,732	-5.8
1995	111,825	-5.0
1996	106,181	-5.3
1997	99,413	-6.4
1998	91,508	-8.0
1999	87,527	-4.4
2000	82,937	-5.2
2001	76,875	-7.3
2002	74,012	-3.7
2003	70,375	-4.9
2004	66,830	-5.0
2005	64,540	-3.4
2006	62,070	-3.8
2007	59,130	-4.7
2008	57,127	-3.4

Since 1992, the drop in licensed or so-called commercial dairy farms has been 74,382, from 131,509 to 57,127. That's a drop of 57 percent during that time.

The farms counted in this survey are those that have a permit to sell milk. This number differs from another USDA estimate . . . operations with milk cows. That total now is 67,000 and has declined 103,500 or 60.7 percent since 1992.

Table 2 provides an overview of the past 16 years of change. Nationally, average herd size has more than doubled from 74 to today's 163. Regionally, the West (+212) and the Midwest (+96) have seen the larg-

est percentage gains in average herd size. Western region herds added 63 cows per herd last year, bringing the average up to 820 cows per operation. The Midwest now averages 100 cows per herd.

During that same period, the Midwest saw a 60 percent decline in herd numbers, going from 80,135 to 32,245. Both the Northeast and the West have lost between 46 and 49 percent of their dairy operations since 1992.

The Southeast continues to lose the largest share of farms at 4.9 percent last year compared to 8.8 percent the previous year. Since 1992, the region's operations fell from 12,057 to 4,010 . . . a drop of 8,047 or 67 percent. Cow numbers also followed suit with 609,000 fewer cows or a 49 percent decline.

Among the other regions, the next largest percentage drop last year

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was in the West (-4.4). That was followed by the Midwest and Northeast which both fell 3.2 percent.

Among states with over 1,000 dairy operations in 2007, the largest percentage decline took place in Illinois (-9.4). That state lost 100 farms and now is under 1,000 permitted farms, leaving 12 states above that threshold. Kentucky (-5.4), Iowa (-5.2), Pennsylvania (-4.2), and Minnesota (-4.0) rounded out the largest decliners. Among 1,000-plus operation states, two states had small gains in farm numbers: Missouri 2.3 and Indiana 0.6 percent.

There were four states in the under 1,000 dairy herds category that lost over 10 percent of their operations: Hawaii (-60 . . . 5 down to 2); Colorado (-17.6); North Dakota (-12.1); and Arkansas (-11.8). Rhode Island and Delaware each added five herds. There were nine states in which dairy farm numbers did not change in 2007. 🐄

	1992			2008			Percent change		
	Herds	Cows (1,000s)	Cows/ herd	Herds	Cows (1,000s)	Cows/ herd	Herds	Cows	Cows/ herd
Midwest	80,135	4,100	51	32,245	3,231	100	-60	-21	96
Northeast	29,785	1,824	61	16,045	1,482	92	-46	-19	51
Southeast	12,057	1,253	104	4,010	644	161	-67	-49	55
West	9,558	2,515	263	4,827	3,958	820	-49	57	212
U.S.	131,535	9,692	74	57,127	9,315	163	-57	-4	121

State/Region	2007	2008	Change	Percent change
Midwest				
Illinois	1,060	960	-100	-9.4
Indiana	1,660	1,670	10	0.6
Iowa	2,130	2,020	-110	-5.2
Kansas	435	425	-10	-2.3
Michigan	2,440	2,390	-50	-2.0
Minnesota	5,070	4,865	-205	-4.0
Missouri	1,720	1,760	40	2.3
Nebraska	350	320	-30	-8.6
North Dakota	290	255	-35	-12.1
Ohio	3,430	3,360	-70	-2.0
South Dakota	540	490	-50	-9.3
Wisconsin	14,170	13,730	-440	-3.1
Region total	33,295	32,245	-1,050	-3.2
Northeast				
Connecticut	150	150	0	0.0
Delaware	50	55	5	10.0
Maine	340	330	-10	-2.9
Maryland	585	570	-15	-2.6
Massachusetts	180	180	0	0.0
New Hampshire	130	130	0	0.0
New Jersey	110	110	0	0.0
New York	5,770	5,620	-150	-2.6
Pennsylvania	8,010	7,670	-340	-4.2
Rhode Island	15	20	5	33.3
Vermont	1,120	1,100	-20	-1.8
West Virginia	110	110	0	0.0
Region total	16,570	16,045	-525	-3.2
Southeast				
Alabama	70	65	-5	-7.1
Arkansas	170	150	-20	-11.8
Florida	150	140	-10	-6.7
Georgia	280	270	-10	-3.6
Kentucky	1,120	1,060	-60	-5.4
Louisiana	210	200	-10	-4.8
Mississippi	170	160	-10	-5.9
North Carolina	310	300	-10	-3.2
Oklahoma	320	310	-10	-3.1
South Carolina	80	80	0	0.0
Tennessee	590	550	-40	-6.8
Virginia	745	725	-20	-2.7
Region total	4,215	4,010	-205	-4.9
West				
Alaska	5	5	0	0.0
Arizona	120	120	0	0.0
California	1,960	1,905	-55	-2.8
Colorado	170	140	-30	-17.6
Hawaii	5	2	-3	-60.0
Idaho	665	635	-30	-4.5
Montana	85	80	-5	-5.9
Nevada	25	25	0	0.0
New Mexico	170	160	-10	-5.9
Oregon	310	300	-10	-3.2
Texas	700	670	-30	-4.3
Utah	280	260	-20	-7.1
Washington	530	500	-30	-5.7
Wyoming	25	25	0	0.0
Region total	5,050	4,827	-223	-4.4
U.S. Total	59,130	57,127	-2,003	-3.4