

**Characterization of certified organic Wisconsin dairy farms: Management practices, feeding regimes and milk production.** *C.A Hardie\*<sup>1</sup>, V.E Cabrera<sup>1</sup>, M Dutreuil<sup>1</sup>, R Gildersleeve<sup>2</sup>, M Wattiaux<sup>1</sup>; UW Madison, Madison, WI, USA<sup>1</sup>, UW Extension, Dodgeville, WI, USA<sup>2</sup>*

The purpose of this project was to characterize certified organic Wisconsin dairy farms and evaluate their feeding regimes during the course of 2010. Farms were identified by cross listing two separate directories: the Wisconsin Active Dairy Producers and the Wisconsin Certified Organic Producers. All resulting organic dairy herds from these lists were invited to participate (N=565) in this study. An on-sight survey containing sections on farm demographics; feeding, pasturing, cropping and nutrient management practices; sources of income; and farm satisfaction was conducted on 54 farms throughout the state between March 2011 and January 2012. Forty-six percent of the farms relied entirely on family labor to complete farm chores. Total area operated ranged from 17.8 to 775.6 ha, with a mean ( $\pm$ SD) of 123.4 ( $\pm$ 133.4). Hectares of pasture ranged from 6.1 to 145.8, with a mean ( $\pm$ SD) of 40.9 ( $\pm$ 30.84). Herd size ranged from 12 to 650 cows, with a mean ( $\pm$ SD) of 71.3 ( $\pm$ 92.2). The predominant breed varied on the farms, too, with 51.9, 27.8, 9.3, and 11.1% of the herds having Holstein, crossbred, Jersey, and other, respectively as their major breed. Milk rolling herd averages varied from 2,356 to 10,274 kg/cow per year, with a mean ( $\pm$ SD) of 6,182 ( $\pm$ 1,846). Total dry matter intake (DMI) for lactating cows ranged from 11.8 to 25.6 kg/cow per day, with a mean ( $\pm$ SD) of 19.8 ( $\pm$ 3.4). Peak pasture intake during the grazing season ranged from 1 to 100 percent of total DMI, with a mean ( $\pm$ SD) of 69.1 ( $\pm$ 25.5). The farms' grazing seasons in 2010 ranged from 122 to 244 d, with a mean ( $\pm$ SD) of 182.0 ( $\pm$ 28.7). During the grazing season, 79.6, 13.0, and 31.5% of the herds supplemented grain, protein, and corn silage, respectively. As indicated by the ranges and SD presented here, certified organic Wisconsin dairy farms varied widely in farm characteristics, feeding regimes, and animal production. Awareness of these extreme variations should help

design extension programs and agricultural publications better suited to meet the educational needs of this growing dairy sector. Supported by AFRI Competitive Grant no. 2010-51300-20534.

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