

Constraints for nutritional grouping in Wisconsin dairy farms.

F. E. Contreras-Govea*, V. E. Cabrera, L. E. Armentano, R. D. Shaver, and P. M. Crump, *University of Wisconsin-Madison, Department of Dairy Science, Madison.*

The objective of this survey was to quantify the percentage of dairy farmers that feed a single ration and identify existing constraints to grouping and precision feeding of lactating cow groups. A 2-page questionnaire was mailed to all Wisconsin dairy farms with 200 or more lactating milking cows ($n = 800$). After one reminder, the response rate was 25% (196). The survey consisted of 12 questions that covered general description of the farm and specific about grouping and feeding. Average lactating dairy cows per herd was 604 (range 200 to 3,200) and rolling herd average was 11,657 kg milk/cow per yr (range 7,031 to 14,968). Data were analyzed using the non-parametric Wilcoxon-Rank scores, which compared the responses among 5 herd size categories: 200–250, 251–380, 381–525, 526–802, and > 802 lactating cows. Questions were asked about what farmers are currently doing regarding to grouping, how they perceive grouping and feeding groups, and constraints to feeding more than one ration to lactating cows. Responses ranked from 1, strongly disagree, to 5, strongly agree. A difference among herd size was found for criteria for grouping lactating cows. Herds with more than 250 cows gave more importance to the need for keeping pens full (3.65) ($P < 0.025$) and having a fresh cow group ($P < 0.001$), with the latter as the most important (4.62) for all farm sizes. Criteria for feeding more than one ration were not different among herd size categories. Higher ranking were given to fresh vs. all other cows (3.77) and stage of lactation for non-fresh cows (2.96). A quarter of respondents (25%) reported feeding the same ration to all lactating herd. Within this 25%, 63% (31 farms) were in the range of 200 to 380 lactating cows. The main constraints for feeding more than one ration were given to keep it simple (48%) and the perception that milk drops when cows are moved to a different group (52%). We concluded that 75% of dairy farms in Wisconsin feed more than one ration and 91% perform some grouping in lactating cows, but there are farms with herd size between 200 and 802 (81%) that could increase feed efficiency by enhancing some management tools of grouping and nutritional feeding.

Key Words: grouping, nutritional feeding