

FUN FACES OF WISCONSIN AGRICULTURE
HOLLY HOLSTEIN'S DAIRY FAST FACTS (8/2011)



Production Information

Dairy animals (bovines) are ruminant animals that have stomachs with four compartments. A mature cow will eat 20-25 pounds of grain, 40-60 pounds of ensilage, 30 pounds of hay, and drinks about 15-25 gallons of water each day (about a bathtub full). She will spend up to 8 hours chewing her cud as she breaks down her food. A cow will be bred so that her first calf is born when she is about 24 months of age. Gestation (time from breeding to birth) is about 279-290 days or nine months. Cows may be bred with a bull, artificially or through embryo transfer. There are six major dairy breeds so the cow size (average 1600 pounds), calf birthing weight (70-110 pounds) and milk production levels will vary. The major breeds are Holstein, Brown Swiss, Jersey, Guernsey, Milking Shorthorn and Ayrshire. A cow will normally have one calf once a year. She will have a rest period (dry period) for about 6-8 weeks prior to the birth of her next calf; she won't produce milk and her body is able to concentrate on the new calf inside her. A cow is milked on average for 305 days. Most farms milk either 2 or 3 times per day. The average Wisconsin cow gives 56 pounds (about 6.5 gallons) of milk per day. Milking machines are designed to simulate the calf's sucking motion. Barns will vary in style, size and design. Dairy farms will vary in size and how animals are fed. Milk is taken from the dairy barn to processing plants. Proper cooling of milk is needed at all times. Barns and milk plants are inspected for food safety standards.

Wisconsin Production

The dairy industry contributes \$26.5 billion in economic activity to Wisconsin each year and is Wisconsin's largest agriculture enterprise. In 2009, Wisconsin produced 25.2 billion pounds of milk. Wisconsin leads the nation in cheese production at 2.63 billion pounds and is second in milk production. The state is home to over 1.26 million dairy cows. On average, the state's cows each produce 20,000 pounds each year. In 2010, Wisconsin had 12,500 dairy herds. The average herd size was 129 cows.

Career Information

Producers rely on many consultants to help them on a daily basis: nutritionist (feeding cows), crop scouts (growing feed), artificial inseminators (breeding cows), housing specialists (ventilation and building design), mechanics (keeping machinery operating), truck drivers (hauling milk, feed and machinery), accountants (advising business decisions and money handling), advertisers (helping sell end products) and many others!

Trivia

- 90% of Wisconsin cheese is sold out-of-state.
- The average American eats 31 pounds of cheese each year.
- It takes 10 pounds of milk to make 1 pound of cheese and 12 pounds of milk to make 1 gallon of ice cream.
- One gallon of milk weighs 8.6 pounds.
- 99% of WI farms are family owned.

Other Information

Cow- adult female that has produced a calf

Bull- male animal

Steer- male animal that has been castrated and cannot breed

Heifer- young female that has not produced a calf

Calf- young dairy animal (either sex)

Wisconsin is called "America's Dairyland" because of our 160 years of dairy experience. Wisconsin cheese plants produce over 600 types of cheese. Dairy cows utilize the many forages grown in our state.

Methane digesters produce methane from manure. Methane can be used to produce energy or electricity. Because manure is important for soil structure and nutrients, cows are natural recyclers.