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Dairy

December brings wide swings in U.S. milk production

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press



Carol Ryan Dumas/Capital Press

Cows feed in the sunshine at this dairy in Wendell, Idaho, last fall. According to the USDA, milk production in the Pacific Northwest increased in December.

U.S. milk production was all over the board in December, from a 13 percent year-over-year increase in South Dakota to a 6.2 percent decrease in New Mexico, according to the National Agricultural Statistics Service.

Milk production was generally up in the north and down in the south, NASS reported.

Milk production in the 23 major states was up 0.7 percent to nearly 16.4 billion pounds. Cow count was up 29,000 head year over year to 8.64 million, while milk per cow was up an average of 6 pounds to 1,894 pounds.

Of the 23 states, 15 posted increases in milk production, with heavy hitters Wisconsin and New York up 4.8 percent and 3.5 percent, respectively.

South Dakota's impressive increase was on an additional 12,000 head and a 10-pound jump per cow production to

1,900 pounds. Wisconsin added cows, up 6,000 head to 1.28 million and bumped per-cow production 80 pounds to 1,935 pounds.

New York also added cows, up 5,000 head to 620,000, and bettered milk per cow by 50 pounds to 1,940 pounds.

Michigan added 10,000 cows year over year and another 35 pounds to per-cow production, upping milk production 4.8 percent to 876 million pounds.

Pacific Northwest states also contributed to the overall production increase, with output rising 2.9 percent in Oregon, 1.1 percent in Idaho and 0.4 percent in Washington.

Cow numbers were up 8,000 head in Idaho and 1,000

head in Oregon and held steady in Washington. Milk per cow was down 5 pounds in Idaho, up 35 pounds in Oregon and up 10 pounds in Washington.

Production declines continued in the Southwest, where top milk-maker California posted its 13th consecutive month of year-over-year declines. The state's milk production, at 3.36 million pounds, was down 3 percent on 4,000 fewer cows and a drop of 55 pounds per cow.

New Mexico and Texas, which took the brunt of winter storm Goliath at year's end, were also down, New Mexico for the 12th consecutive month and Texas continuing its downward trend since last spring.

The storm brought snow drifts of up to 10 feet in some areas of New Mexico and Texas, resulting in the death of thousands of dairy cows, interruptions of milk deliveries and low yields, USDA Economic Research Service reported in its latest Livestock, Poultry and Dairy Outlook.

Per-cow production in New Mexico was down 105 pounds year over year, and cow numbers were off by 4,000. Per-cow production in Texas was down 20 pounds, and cow count declined 9,000 head.

Disturbed lactation cycles of surviving cows might potentially contribute to lower yields in those states for a prolonged period, ERS reported.

House bill proposes an option to Washington Ecology's manure rules

Environmentalists pans legislation

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press



Don Jenkins/Capital Press

A lagoon on a dairy in northwestern Washington holds manure that will fertilize fields in the spring. A dairy industry-supported bill in the Legislature would direct the Department of Ecology to work with the Department of Agriculture on manure-handling rules.

OLYMPIA — A dairy industry-backed House bill introduced Friday proposes that the Washington Department of Agriculture help develop an alternative to manure-handling rules expected soon from the state's ecology agency.

House Bill 2840 wouldn't stop the Department of Ecology from issuing those rules, which dairy lobbyists contend could be a financially crushing combination of state and federal laws. But it would direct DOE to also work with the agriculture department on a separate pollution-control plan, with WSDA as the primary enforcer.

Dairies could operate under either the new DOE regulations or under the rules developed in collaboration with WSDA, according to the legislation sponsored by two Democrats and two Republicans on the House Agriculture Committee.

HB 2840 doesn't specify how the programs would differ, though it directs WSDA and DOE to set a policy for identifying manure lagoons that pose a significant risk to groundwater. DOE's preliminary proposal assumes all lagoons discharge pollutants and subject to new regulations. The dairy industry contests that assumption.

Washington State Dairy Federation spokesman Jay Gordon said he hopes WSDA and DOE would come up with a simpler and less expensive plan for dairies to follow. He said DOE's preliminary proposal would be "tough for farms to imple-

ment just from a bureaucratic standpoint."

The bill comes as DOE nears completion of a months-long effort to rewrite its rules for concentrated animal feeding operation permits.

The updated rules will incorporate U.S. Environmental Protection Agency requirements for preventing surface-water pollution with new regulations that DOE says are needed to prevent manure stored in lagoons or spread on fields from contaminating groundwater.

Environmental lobbyist Bruce Wishart said the bill isn't needed and could "poison" ongoing negotiations over DOE's rules.

"It's certainly going to create discussions, but also generate controversy. I think

it will cause things to be more polarized," said Wishart, who represents the Sierra Club and the Puget Soundkeepers Alliance. "The bill seems designed to limit enforcement of some important water-quality laws."

DOE and WSDA spokesmen said their departments are reviewing the bill and have not taken positions.

Gordon said the bill would let state policymakers retain control over groundwater protection, without EPA's involvement.

"It's our right as a state," he said. "The process of having legislation out there and having the discussion is an important process."

EPA spokeswoman Judy Smith said the agency is reviewing the bill.

Wishart criticized HB 2840 for not allowing citizens lawsuits to enforce pollution-control laws and for assigning WSDA the job of enforcing groundwater-protection rules.

"The Department of Agriculture is not a water-quality agency, and we don't have confidence in their ability to carry out this program," he said. "It's the Department of Ecology that should be in this primary role."

WSDA inspectors currently enforce the state's law on how dairies manage manure.

"I think farmers appreciate inspectors who have the training and experience," Gordon said. "The thought is there's no sense in having two different sets of inspectors."

EPA provides insight on dairy inspections

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

TWIN FALLS, Idaho — Expecting Environmental Protection Agency spot inspections on dairies this spring, the Idaho Dairymen's Association invited EPA personnel to one of its district meetings on Jan. 19 to give dairymen a heads-up on what to expect if an inspector shows up on their farm.

EPA typically tries to provide some advance notice, whether that's a day or an hour, but does reserve the right to conduct an inspection without notice, said Nick Peak, EPA Region 10 CAFO coordinator.

"On-the-spot inspection is part of the ballgame, especially when responding to a complaint," he said.

But the agency does try not to disrupt the daily operation too much, he said.

Even in a surprise inspection, dairymen do have the ability to get the right personnel there for the inspection, said Rick Naerebout, IDA director of operations.

If an inspector shows up, he will ask for the person most responsible for day-to-day activities or Clean Water Act compliance, and he will wait for that person, Peak said.

Sometimes the agency has contractors do spot inspections, but they will have credentials. Inspectors are not allowed to let anyone hold or photocopy the credentials, but they will show those credentials. Dairymen should ask for a business card or obtain the name of the inspector and his supervisor as well as a contact number, he said.

If a dairyman can't get sufficient information, he can deny access. But if access is denied to an identified, legitimate inspector, EPA will have

to get a warrant — and things become onerous, he said.

"The last thing an inspector wants to do is get a warrant," he said.

If the agency gets a complaint of a discharge, it refers the complaint to the state Department of Agriculture. If it gets multiple complaints, it will respond and try to get an inspector from the ag department to come along, he said.

The inspector will carefully try to figure out if the complaint is legitimate. He'll introduce himself, go through what he wants to look at, whether a sample is to be taken, whether he wants to see records, and answer any questions, he said.

If the inspector wants to take photos, dairymen should also take photos. The same goes for taking samples. EPA can take duplicate samples for the dairyman, and that's a reasonable request, he said.

"If it were me, I'd be there every step of the way," he said.

Most inspections don't take more than a morning or afternoon and end with an exit interview. Inspectors will go through everything with the producer and answer questions. If a producer is too busy, the exit interview can be done another day. But it's one of the most important components, and producers should definitely follow up on it, he said.

Inspectors will never make a compliance decision in the field. Instead, they write up a report that goes to a compliance officer. They will, however, go over compliance concerns in the exit interview and are allowed to provide compliance assistance, he said.

There could be some follow-up calls by the inspector and sometimes a return visit, he said.

Cheese, butter prices mixed

By LEE MIELKE
For the Capital Press

Dairy Markets
Lee Mielke



concerned about rising inventories."

Meanwhile, last weekend's snow storm boosted local retail milk sales and adversely impacted dairy cows and dairy operations. Milk was reportedly dumped as the storm shut down roads to milk pickups.

Cash butter, after plunging 11 3/4-cents Tuesday, regained three-quarters Thursday and 3 cents Friday, to finish at \$2.17 per pound, down 8 cents on the week but 62 cents above a year ago. Eight cars sold last week at the CME.

The yellow gold inched down a half-cent Monday but jumped 2 1/2-cents Tuesday, on four trades, to \$2.19 per pound, with a bid at that price going unfilled.

Central butter production is reported as active as cream is readily available from sources within and outside the region, according to DMN. Food service orders are unchanged.

Cash Cheddar block cheese closed the Martin Luther King Day holiday-shortened week at \$1.46 per pound, down 3 1/2-cents on the week and 2 cents below a year ago.

The Cheddar barrels closed at \$1.43, down 9 1/2-cents on the week and 1 1/2-cents below a year ago. Only three cars of block and eight of barrel traded hands last week at the CME.

Traders had the weekend to digest Friday afternoon's December Milk Production and Cold Storage reports, both viewed as bearish for the most part, but they left the blocks and the barrels unchanged Monday and Tuesday, with no activity.

Midwest cheese makers indicate a slowdown in commercial cheese sales, according to Dairy Market News: "Milk supplies are readily available and cheese production is active. Cheese inventories are building, which is typical for early First Quarter, and most cheese makers are not very

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