

DAIRY COWS

Man or machine?

Dairy farming is a big responsibility because dairy cows need care 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Each dairy cow has to be milked at least 2-3 times a day, no matter what.

Although machines often do the milking, people are still needed for feeding, cleaning, record keeping, ensuring that equipment is working properly, checking animals to make sure they are healthy – and much more!



THERE'S AN APP FOR THAT!

Besides milking machines, other types of computer technology help control daily operations of a dairy barn. Computer-controlled heating and cooling systems ensure that cows are housed at the right temperature and humidity level. Computers track milking and feeding, and manage automatic sorting gates that separate out sick cows or cows that are ready for breeding. Many dairy farmers follow what's going on in their barns on their cell phones!

Farmers also use pedometers to help them manage their herds. A pedometer strapped to a cow's leg records the animal's motion patterns (walking, standing still, lying down), then relays the data to a computer. If a cow walks fewer steps than normal, it might be an indication that she is getting sick.



Milking cows by machine instead of by hand is easier and more sanitary. Plus, it's more efficient, taking only 5-10 minutes for each cow – about half the time it takes by hand – which also makes milking less stressful for the animal.



DAIRY FARMERS DON'T WORK ALONE

Farmers work closely with veterinarians to prevent and treat disease and ensure the general health of the herd. Cows with infections are treated with antibiotics that cure infections and reduce pain and suffering. Health care also includes keeping barns clean, preventing exposure to disease, providing proper nutrition, making sure that pregnant cows receive proper care, and tending to newborn calves.

Animal nutritionists are a big part of a dairy farm team. They create special diets for cows, called **rations**, that ensure the cows get the proper nutrition depending on their condition (e.g., pregnant, milking, ready-to-breed).



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HEALTHY COWS = HEALTHY MILK

As part of its **Canadian Quality Milk Program**¹, Dairy Farmers of Canada has developed standards that help farmers ensure their cows' health and the safety of their cows' milk. **ProAction**² is another program developed by Dairy Farmers of Canada that focuses on safe, quality milk while meeting the public's expectations regarding animal care and environmental responsibility. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) samples and tests each truckload of milk for chemical residues (including antibiotics), as well as microorganisms.³

The **Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Dairy Cattle**⁴ also provides Canadian dairy farmers with standards for housing, nutrition and health-care needs of their cows.



Loading milk truck

WHY ARE DAIRY COWS KEPT INDOORS?

Dairy cows produce milk for about 10 months of the year. When milking, most dairy cows live indoors in the winter, although young cows and cows that aren't milking (dry cows) may be housed outdoors. Many dairy farmers often let their cows go to pasture to feed during mild weather. When it's rainy or too warm outdoors, dairy cows prefer the comfort of a well-ventilated barn. In addition, barns protect dairy cows from diseases and predators such as coyotes and wolves. Both indoor and outdoor facilities are designed with cow comfort and proper nutrition in mind.



Types of dairy barns

Tie-stall barns provide each cow with a stall that includes bedding and free access to food and water. Farmers milk cows by machine in these stalls.

Free-stall barns have large areas where cows move around freely. Cows are milked by machine in a central milking parlour.

Robotic barns are similar to free-stall barns, except that cows go to a milking station where they are automatically milked whenever they want! Some cows will choose to be milked up to 6 times a day!

