



**J. Dairy Sci. 99:1–12**  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.3168/jds.2015-10619>  
 © American Dairy Science Association®, 2016.

## Public and farmer perceptions of dairy cattle welfare in the United States

**C. A. Wolf,<sup>\*1</sup> G. T. Tonsor,<sup>†</sup> M. G. S. McKendree,<sup>†</sup> D. U. Thomson,<sup>‡</sup> and J. C. Swanson<sup>§</sup>**

<sup>\*</sup>Department of Agricultural, Food, and Resource Economics, Michigan State University, East Lansing 48824

<sup>†</sup>Department of Agricultural Economics, and

<sup>‡</sup>Department of Diagnostic Medicine and Pathobiology, Kansas State University, Manhattan 66506

<sup>§</sup>Department of Animal Science, Michigan State University, East Lansing 48824

### ABSTRACT

This research used surveys of the public and dairy farmers in the United States to assess perceptions and attitudes related to dairy cattle welfare. Sixty-three percent of public respondents indicated that they were concerned about dairy cattle welfare. Most public respondents agreed that animal welfare was more important than low milk prices but that the average American did not necessarily agree. Most public respondents had not viewed media stories related to dairy cattle welfare. Respondents who had viewed these stories did so on television or Internet. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) was viewed as the most accurate source of information related to dairy cattle welfare, followed by the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) and the American Veterinary Medicine Association (AVMA). Both public and dairy farmer respondents viewed farmers as having the most influence on dairy cattle welfare. However, there was a general pattern of public respondents indicating that groups including USDA, HSUS, and AVMA had a relatively larger influence on dairy cattle welfare than did farmer respondents. In contrast, dairy farmers indicated that individual actors—farmers, veterinarians, consumers—had more influence than the public indicated. When asked about production practices, most public respondents indicated that they would vote for a ban on antibiotic use outside of disease treatment or for the mandated use of pain control in castration. However, a minority indicated they would vote to ban the use of recombinant bovine somatotropin (rbST) or to pay a premium for milk produced without rbST. With respect to explaining public support for the production practice bans and limits, respondents were more likely to vote for the restrictions if they were older, female,

had higher income, or had viewed animal welfare stories in the media.

**Key words:** animal welfare, information sources, public perceptions, multinomial logit

### INTRODUCTION

In recent years, public scrutiny of production practices in livestock agriculture has increased. Curtis (1987) noted that production practices must have scientific evidence behind them to justify their existence. However, Curtis (1987) asserted that the public was ignorant of production practices and would often find even scientifically defensible practices objectionable. The logical solution then might be education to set context for understanding production practices on modern operations. Fraser et al. (1997) defined animal welfare as having 3 dimensions: animal functioning, animal feeling, and animal ability to live a reasonably natural life. The best animal welfare-related policies for the dairy industry will address all 3 dimensions. The ultimate goal for the industry and researchers is to improve the lives of cattle and farmers (von Keyserlingk et al., 2009).

Ellis et al. (2009) noted that animal welfare concerns are likely to become more important in the future and that consumers are removed from food production and therefore do not have accurate knowledge of the food chain. Ellis et al. (2009) found that most respondents in the UK would pay more for “good” dairy welfare and suggested improved consumer education and clear labeling to improve market signals for dairy cattle welfare. Boogaard et al. (2011) described the complicated relationship that society has with modern production animal agriculture. Although the public appreciates the supply of relatively cheap and very safe food, they have concerns about the size and scale (and production practices that accompany these technology sets) of modern operations that relate to impacts on the environment and animal welfare. Boogaard et al. (2011) studied Dutch citizens and found that those with experience and knowledge of farming were the most content with

Received November 10, 2015.

Accepted March 8, 2016.

<sup>1</sup>Corresponding author: wolfch@msu.edu

contemporary dairy farming. Similarly, other studies have found discrepancies in animal welfare assessment between farmers and the public (Te Velde et al., 2002; Vanhonacker et al., 2008; Miele et al., 2011).

In recent years in the United States, undercover videos have periodically been released of poor cattle conditions and abuse on dairy farms, which focuses public attention on dairy cattle welfare issues (e.g., Webb, 2010; Barrett and Bergquist, 2013; Miller, 2014). Regardless of how prevalent these poor conditions are in the industry, these videos have spurred a host of changes within the industry. In the United States, industry-wide changes in livestock, poultry, and dairy production practices have generally occurred through 2 methods: (1) legislative or ballot initiatives, and (2) retailers requiring suppliers to adopt standards or practices (Mench, 2003). For example, residents in many states have determined, through ballot initiatives or legislation, that particular livestock production practices will be phased out or banned due to associated undesirable animal welfare impacts. Specific to the dairy industry, tail docking was banned in California—the largest milk-producing state—as of January 1, 2010. Alternatively, many food service establishments, from grocers to restaurants, are increasingly purchasing their food from “humanely raised” sources or phasing out specific practices related to animal confinement. Although most attention and legal changes to date have focused on other livestock sectors, the US dairy industry is increasingly aware that these pressures affect them as well. Recognizing these methods of change makes it clear that the perceptions and opinions of the public in their role as both consumers and voters are of critical importance.

In response to the increased scrutiny of dairy farm management practices related to cow welfare, US dairy farm organizations created a voluntary program, Farmers Assuring Responsible Management (FARM), to establish and verify farm practices and to provide assurance to the public at large (NMPF, 2014). This program is intended to lead on dairy cattle welfare issues. For example, the National Milk Producers Federation announced in 2015 that tail docking among their member-farms would end nationwide on December 31, 2016 (Sjostrom, 2015). In addition to this producer program, various animal welfare-related groups have created their own programs that have certification and labeling for marketing purposes (e.g., Humane Farm Animal Care, 2014).

Because of increased scrutiny of production practices, it is critical that US dairy farmers be aware of public perceptions. With knowledge of these perceptions and attitudes, dairy farmers can make informed decisions

about production practices used on their farms while enhancing public trust and maintaining their social license. This research aims to assess US public and dairy farmer attitudes and perceptions about dairy cattle welfare to compare the groups as well as to provide a benchmark for discussion and monitoring.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The public and dairy farmer surveys were written by a team of Michigan State University (East Lansing) and Kansas State University (Manhattan) researchers in fall 2013 and spring 2014. The surveys were scrutinized by industry and academic experts. Both surveys were anonymous and approved by Michigan State University’s Human Research Protection Program. Each of the surveys and samples are described in this section followed by the statistical and regression analysis used to examine results.

### *Public Survey*

A national online survey was administered in April 2014 to collect information about US public milk-purchasing habits, perceptions of dairy cow welfare, and demographic characteristics, including age, education, sex, household size, and income (Wolf et al., 2015b). The public survey was administered to US households online, with participants being recruited from a large opt-in panel that has been used effectively in other research (e.g., Louviere et al., 2008; Tonsor, 2011). Participants were recruited from a panel maintained by Survey Sampling International (SSI, Shelton, CT) to be a sample representative of primary US household shoppers based on age, income, and state of residence. We focused on respondents who were the primary household food shopper, as we were interested in their purchasing and consumption preferences.

In total, 2,001 completed surveys were collected. The public survey asked questions about the respondent’s concern about dairy cattle welfare, agreement with statements regarding guiding dairy industry principles, the accuracy of dairy cattle welfare media sources, the ability of groups to influence dairy cattle welfare, and whether he or she would vote or pay for specific production practices.

### *Dairy Farmer Survey*

The dairy farmer survey was administered by mail in March and April 2014 (Wolf et al., 2015a). Dairy farmers were randomly drawn from lists of production operations licensed to ship milk acquired from Depart-

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/10973685>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/10973685>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)