

New York Dairy Farms

Championing rural life,
preserving our environment



Animal agriculture, particularly dairy farming, has always played a major role in New York State. As one of the state's largest business sectors, family dairy farms in New York serve as the economic engines for many of our rural communities.

Farmers also serve as the caretakers for many of our natural resources by preserving the open space necessary to support biodiversity, ensure beautiful viewsheds and protect water quality.



The State of the New York Dairy Industry

In driving through New York, the dairy businesses of today appear different than those of even twenty years ago. Perhaps the most noticeable difference is that many of today's farms are larger.

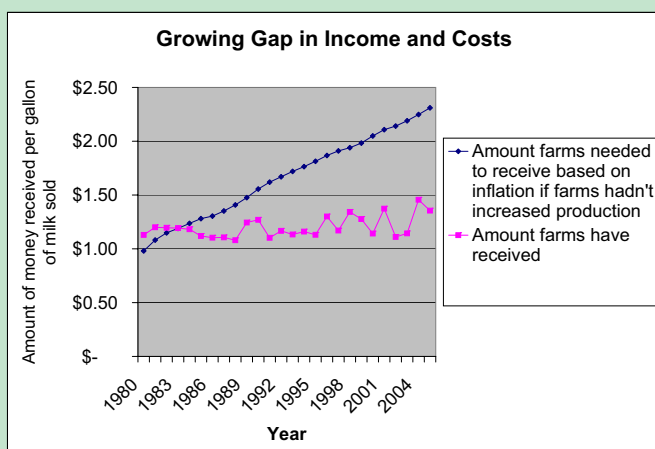
Competing in a Global Market

Over the past 25 years, the forces of globalization have impacted every business sector, including dairy farms. Today, because of both national and foreign competition, New York dairy farms receive about the same price for their milk as they did in 1980. Even though the price they receive has not increased, every year farmers are forced to pay more for the inputs they use in producing milk. In order to make up the difference, the farm may need to generate more revenue through the milking of more cows.

New York dairies are receiving nearly the same price for milk today as they did in 1980.

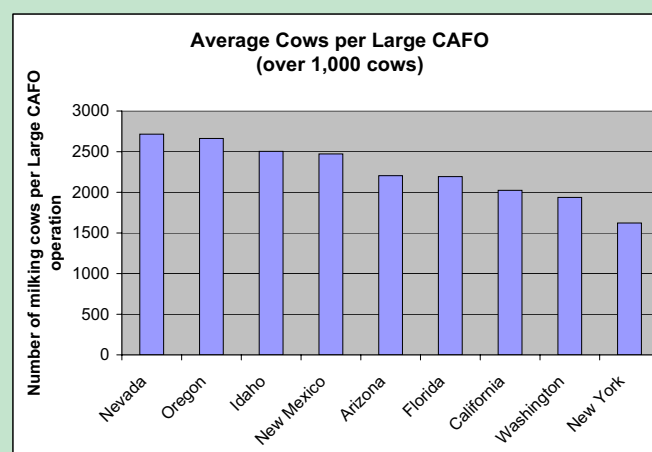
Powering Rural Economies

Both large and small farms play an important role in sustaining rural communities across New York State. With over \$1.6 billion in average sales, New York dairy farms alone are responsible for over \$3.6 billion in return to the state's economy and the employment of over 28,000 people.



New York Versus the Rest

While New York farms have grown, compared to other states, our large dairy farms are not among the largest. According to U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) data, New York ranks thirty-third among the states for average herd size. Comparing the number of large farms — over 1,000 cows — to other states like New Mexico and Oregon, New York State pales in comparison.



In addition, New York's farms have taken the lead in environmental protection. All of New York's large farms have signed up for CAFO permits and millions of dollars have been invested in implementing environmentally-focused practices on our farms.

Keeping It In the Family

Farmers are constantly examining ways to make sure their business continues to be a family business. When a child returns to the farm, the farm needs to generate more money to support the child and his or her family. The farm also needs to be able to offer normal quality of life standards, such as time off, to all those involved. Since farming is a 365 day a year job, one way to accomplish both of these goals is to increase the size of the business.

More than 98% of New York's dairy farms are family owned.

The New York CAFO Program

New York was one of the first states to develop a Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation (CAFO) program that ensures farms are actively working to protect the environment.

In the 1990s, New York farmers requested a CAFO program to help protect the environment.

Program Requirements

The NYS Department of Environmental Conservation's (DEC) CAFO permit program is the regulatory program for dairy farms with more than 200 cows. It requires that farms implement an environmental management plan called a Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan (CNMP). This plan is specifically engineered to reduce a farm's environmental footprint and make sure that manure is only applied to fields at a rate that is based on crop need.



"My family farm works on almost a daily basis with agricultural engineers, soil scientists and crop advisors to help us operate a successful farm and protect the environment at the same time."

—George Allen, dairy farmer

Program Enforcement

A CNMP in New York is extremely complex and can only be completed by a Certified Planner. Planners undergo rigorous training and review to ensure their plans are done to scientific and engineering standards. This certification program is administered by the NYS Soil & Water Conservation Committee, NYS Department of Agriculture & Markets, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the DEC.

Agricultural Environmental Management Program

Locally-led Soil and Water Conservation Districts and the Agricultural Environmental Management (AEM) program are helping farms of all sizes that want to voluntarily develop critical watershed management strategies. These best management practices enhance environmental quality on these farms, develop and maintain beneficial neighbor relations and protect the land for future generations. For more information, visit www.nys-soilandwater.org.



Even if a farm is not large enough to be regulated under the CAFO program, many farms are voluntarily taking action to protect the environment.

Agricultural Districts Law

All too often when residents move from the cities or suburbs to the more rural areas of the state to enjoy the benefits of the country lifestyle, they do not appreciate that the beautiful rolling hills and open spaces that drew them to the area are located within an Agricultural District. These locally created districts contain actual working farms that must, by necessity or regulation, collect and spread manure, use pesticides and keep long hours in the fields or milking parlors.

Agricultural District Specifics

An Agricultural District is initiated locally, offering the community the opportunity to choose to support agriculture. The law also offers necessary protections for farmers that enable them to run their businesses without fear of ill-conceived, unnecessary restrictions that can put farms out of business.

Since 2000, over 9,000 farms in 269 watersheds have voluntarily participated in the AEM program.

Fact & Fiction

Dairy farm operations are complex and often misunderstood by the general public. Below are some common myths about how dairy operations work and the truth to set the record straight.

Myth #1

New York's farms rank poorly in environmental protection compared to other states.

Fact #1

New York has among the strongest water quality regulations in the U.S. In fact, a recent Second Circuit Court of Appeals ruling indicated that New York's CAFO program even exceeds the Clean Water Act requirements.

Myth #2

There is no oversight of New York's CAFOs.

Fact #2

Trained and certified agricultural water quality planning professionals oversee all CAFO farm manure management plans. These professionals have strong backgrounds in agricultural planning and are charged with developing a specific, regularly-updated manure management plan to protect water quality.

Myth #3

Farms do not need manure storage facilities and do not need to spread manure.

Fact #3

Manure storage facilities are essential on CAFO farms. Livestock manure is a natural source of fertilizer and organic matter, which provides many benefits to the soil, including providing nutrients, increasing water holding capacity, and improving structure. Manure is stored until the most environmentally-sound time to apply it to the soil so it can serve these functions.

Myth #4

Farmers do not take into account their neighbors questions or concerns about how, why or when manure is spread.

Fact #4

Farmers make every effort to ensure superior neighbor relations and take steps to minimize any negative impacts on their surrounding community. For example, many farmers work with community members by attempting to coordinate certain farm activities around neighbors' schedules and offer the public opportunities to come visit the farm and see how the farm runs.