

From the desk of the DairyDoc

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Is feeding a low starch, forage-based diet early the answer to fewer liver abscesses in dairy beef cross steers?

We are all aware that the unique opportunity the dairy industry has with dairy/beef cross steers is overshadowed by the packer's concerns for liver abscesses and the consequential losses sustained with those abscesses. For a while now most experts have hinted at nutritional strategies being the answer to this issue, but little indication to exactly what strategy would be the answer without sacrificing performance. Recent work at Iowa State, supported by the Iowa Beef Industry Council and the Iowa Beef Checkoff (not yet published in peer reviewed journal, but downloadable at this [link](#)) at, seems to indicate that early ruminal development with low-starch, forage-based diets early in life may be the secret to fewer liver abscesses, healthier rumens, and heavier carcasses without sacrificing performance. Read more on this information in the April 22 Dairy Herd Management at this [link](#).

The latest dairy data for New Mexico continue to show consolidation.

If you receive Progressive Dairy, you may have already seen the 2024 US Dairy Statistics overview based on the February release of the [USDA Milk Production Report](#). The [PD compilation](#) shows some interesting national trends including the fact that total milk production in the US declined for a second year in a row while production per cow continued to increase, amidst a decline in herdsize (-42,000 head lower than 2023 data). That is a clear indicator that in response to challenging times, producers continue to find ways to do less with more. Another drastic trend is that the number of licensed herds declined almost exactly by 20,000 (-45%) over the last decade, down to just shy of 25,000 herds, but 86% of that decline came in the West and East regions.

For New Mexico specific, we have dropped out of the top ten dairy producing states with the decline in number of herds, number of cows and production per cow. New Mexico is now the 11th milk producing state and our production per cow is also at the number 11 spot at 24,717 lbs/cow. The number one spot New Mexico held for many years was the largest average herd size, a position we gave up in 2024 to Arizona with 2,743 cows/herd. The average herd size in the US now stands at 377 cows, almost doubling the herdsize over the last decade.

Positive changes on the horizon? What these changes mean for the remaining dairy producers in New Mexico is something we will dive into in the subsequent article, as the water- and subsequent feed-situation changes significantly with fewer cows to feed. The question is: have we reached a state of reduced rate of decline, and will that be enough to help remaining producers improve feed (forage) quality and subsequent production per cow (lbs of energy corrected milk produced) thereby improving their bottom line?