

From the desk of the DairyDoc

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Dairy Consortium concludes year 16 and graduates another 48 students in challenging times

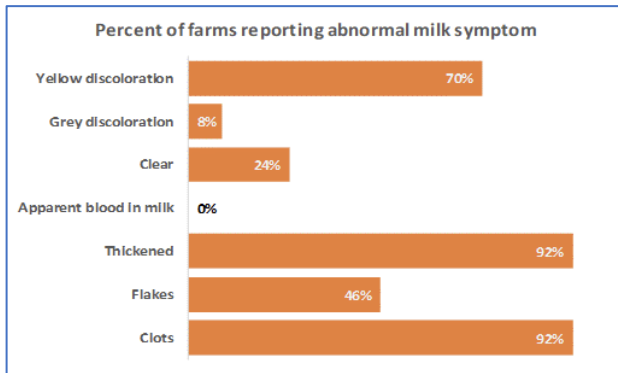
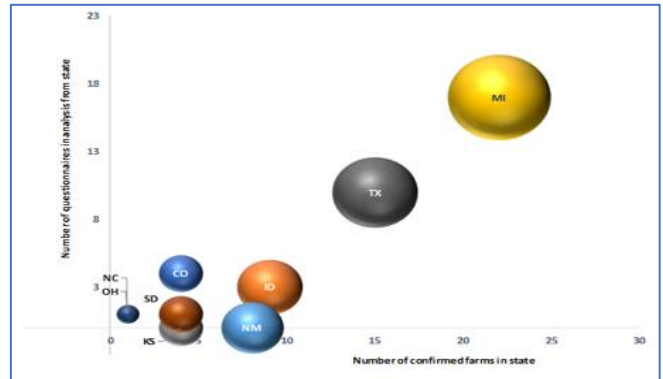
In February of 2024 the Dairy Consortium had accepted what would have been the largest number of students in its 17-year history, when in early March the word about sick cows in Texas and subsequently in New Mexico filled the airways, way before we even knew about HPAI in cattle. As producers responded with enhanced biosecurity measures and limited access to their operations, it appeared for some time we were not going to be able to have a program in 2024, much like 2020 during the height of the COVID situation. In the latter part of March, the students were advised of the issue and given the option for a 2025 raincheck or stand by to see how things would evolve. When in April it became clear that much of the issues surrounding bird flu in our area had “come and gone”, and after receiving the green light from Texas A&M’s office of risk management, we consulted with all of the producers, the heart and soul of part of the Consortium program. Producers overwhelmingly responded with “yes please have a program, especially in a year like this” , and “these students need to learn about this”, “there are lessons in all of this we should be sharing with the next generation”. We did step up biosecurity measures, a great lesson for students in and by itself, which included: minimizing direct contact with cows, milk and mammary tissue (no “udder lab” this year), washing vans between dairy visits, the use of rubber disposable shoe covers for dairy visits, the use of clean safety vests and clothes for every dairy visit and disposable coveralls when requested, and considering a predetermined tour order during a dairy visit. This year’s USDETC cohort received an additional and practical lecture on how to still be able to function in a dynamic dairy business while practicing a sense of heightened biosecurity. We truly appreciate the incredible support we have received from all cooperating producers who live and practice daily the adage to make lemonade when receiving a load of lemons...



USDA-APHIS releases some interesting takeaways from epi-surveys in affected states (June 8)

The Clinical Picture

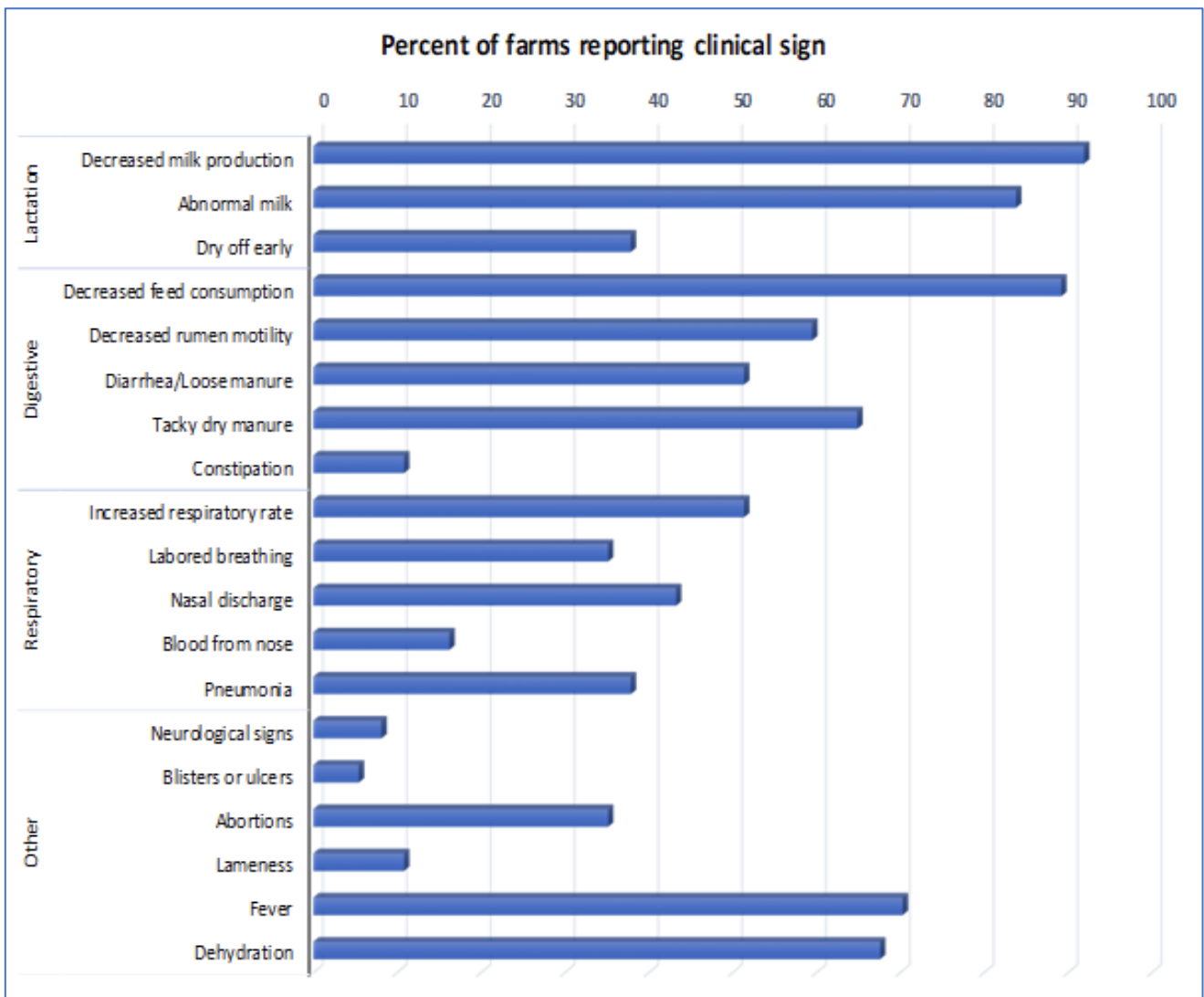
Even though the number of observations is still very small (54% of confirmed premises) which at the time of the report (June 8) was still under 100, only represents less than 0.5% of US dairies.



Clinical observations:

- >80% of affected farms report abnormal lactation and decreased feed consumption; and
- >90% of farms reported thickened or clotted milk.

Potential Transmission Links



Animal Movement:

- >20% of farms received cattle within 30 days of clinical signs; and
- >60% of farms continued to move animals off the farm after onset of clinical signs.

Other species present on dairy farms:

- >80% of farms have cats present
 - >50% of farms with cats observed sick or dead cats; and
- >20% of farms have chickens or poultry present
 - Nearly all farms with poultry observed sick or dead poultry.

Shared transportation vehicles:

- >50% used trucks and trailers that are shared with other farms to transport livestock within 30 days prior to onset of clinical signs; and
- >50% of farms that used shared vehicles do not clean vehicles prior to use.

People: shared Personnel

- >20% of dairies' employees visit other dairies within 30 days of onset of clinical signs;
- >20% of dairies' employees own livestock or poultry at their personal residence;
- >30% of dairies' employees work at another farm with livestock; most employees work on another dairy; and
- >20% of dairies' employees have family members who work at another dairy.

People: Support Services

- >60% of affected farms have regular visitors who have contact with cattle; and
 - Veterinarians
 - Nutritionists/feed consultants
 - Contract haulers
 - Hoof trimmers
- >40% of farms use renderers and breeding technicians.
 - Frequent visitors
 - Most have contact with cattle

Manure/Handling Equipment:

- Majority of farms store manure on the farm;
- >25% of farms use the same equipment to handle manure and animal feed.

Key Takeaways

- The clinical picture is based on observations gathered soon after clinical onset.
- Impact varies significantly between farms.
- Lactating cows are most highly affected.
- Mortality and culling is 2% or less on average.
- Shared equipment that is not cleaned between farms.
- Animal movement is a known and recognized risk for disease transmission.
- Shared personnel are a recognized risk for disease transmission.
- Frequent visitors with access to animals is a recognized risk for disease transmission.
- Risk from manure appears low based on individual manure samples, but more research is needed.
- Contaminated equipment is a recognized risk for disease transmission.

Source: USDA-APHIS National Epidemiological Brief (June 8:)

<https://www.aphis.usda.gov/sites/default/files/hpai-dairy-national-epi-brief.pdf>